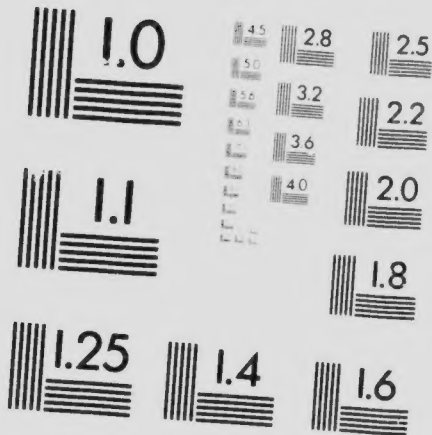


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The **TREASURE TRAIL**



FRANK LILLIE POLLOCK

THE TREASURE TRAIL



SUDDENLY Sullivan stood up jerkily on the deck.¹¹
(See page 328.)

The
Treasure Trail

BY
FRANK L. POLLOCK

With a Frontispiece in Colour by

Louis D. Cowing



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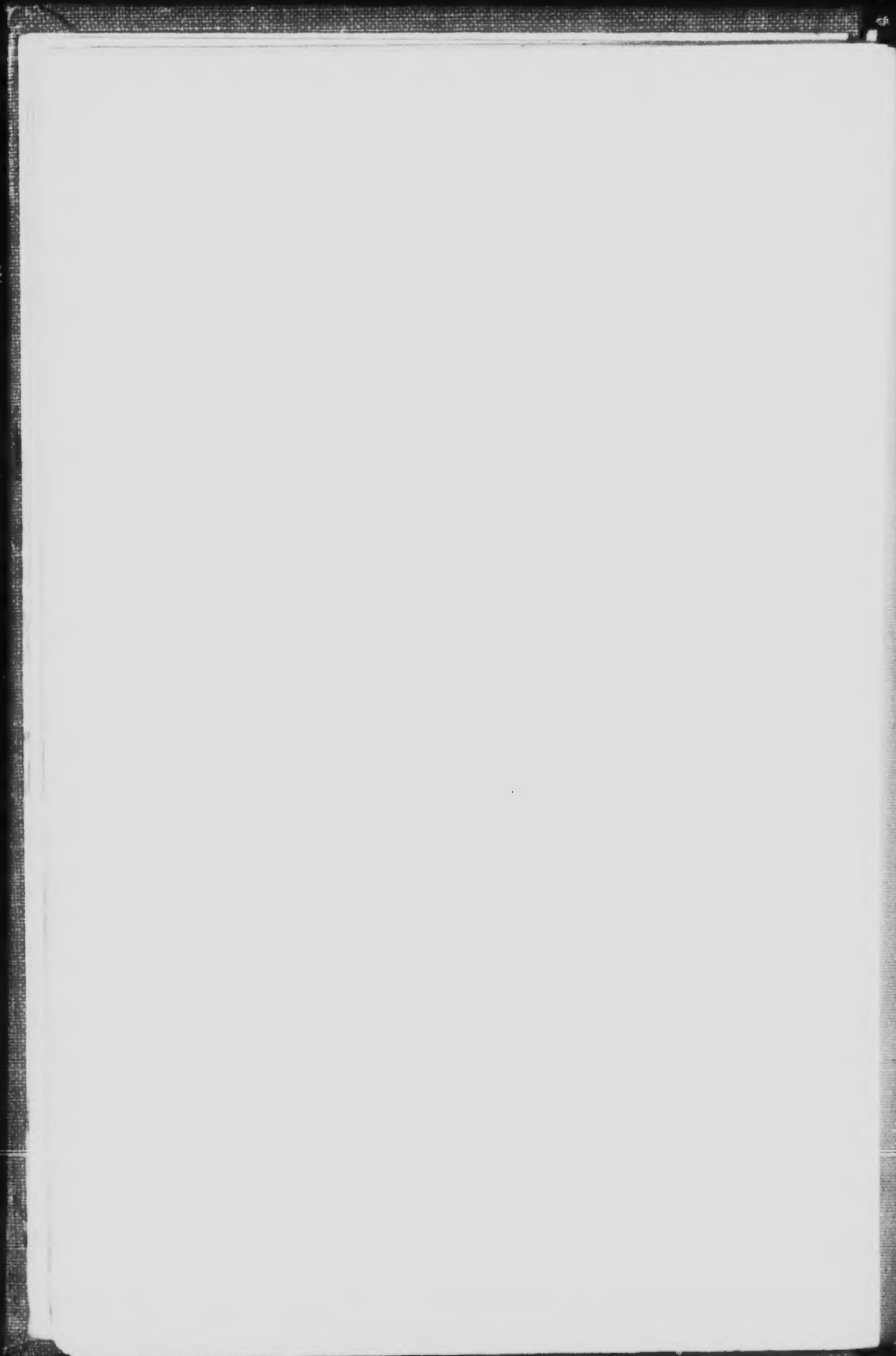
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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE NEW LEAF	1
II. THE OPEN ROAD	18
III. THE ADVENTURER	34
IV. THE FATE OF THE TREASURE SHIP	50
V. THE ACE OF DIAMONDS	70
VI. THE MYSTERY OF THE MATE	88
VII. THE INDISCRETION OF HENNINGER	102
VIII. THE MAN FROM ALABAMA	120
IX. ON THE TRAIL	133
X. A LOST CLUE	153
XI. ILLUMINATION	176
XII. OPEN WAR	193
XIII. FIRST BLOOD	215
XIV. THE CLUE FOUND	236
XV. THE OTHER WAY ROUND THE WORLD	257
XVI. THE END OF THE TRAIL	277
XVII. THE TREASURE	296
XVIII. THE BATTLE ON THE LAGOON	319
XIX. THE SECOND WRECK	335
XX. THE RAINBOW ROAD	352



THE TREASURE TRAIL

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW LEAF

"LORD! what a haul!" Elliott murmured to himself, glancing over his letter while he waited with the horses for Margaret, who had said that she would be just twelve minutes in putting on her riding-costume. The letter was from an old-time Colorado acquaintance who was then superintending a Transvaal gold mine, and, probably by reason of the exigencies of war, the epistle had taken over two months to come from Pretoria. Elliott had been able to peruse it only by snatches, for the pinto horse with the side-saddle was fidgety, communicating its uneasiness to his own mount.

"And managed to loot the treasury of over a million in gold, they say, and got away with it all. The regular members of the Treasury Department were at the front, I suppose, with green hands in their places," he read.

2 THE TREASURE TRAIL

It was a great haul, indeed. Elliott glanced absently along the muddy street of the Nebraska capital, and his face hardened into an expression that was not usual. It was on the whole a good-looking face, deeply tanned, with a pleasant mouth and a small yellowish moustache that lent a boyishness to his whole countenance, belied by the mesh of fine lines about the eyes that come only of years upon the great plains. The eyes were gray, keen, and alive with a spirit of enterprise that might go the length of recklessness; and their owner was, in fact, reflecting rather bitterly that during the past ten years all his enterprises had been too reckless, or perhaps not reckless enough. He had not had the convictions of his courage. The story of the stealings of a ring of Boer ex-officials had made him momentarily regret his own passable honesty; and it struck him that in his present strait he would not care to meet the temptation of even less than a million in gold, with a reasonable chance of getting away with it.

This subjective dishonesty was cut short by Margaret, who hurried down the veranda steps, holding up her brown riding-skirt. She surveyed the pinto with critical consideration.

"Warranted not to pitch," Elliott remarked. "The livery-stable man said a child could ride him."

"You'd better take him, then. I don't want him," retorted Margaret.

"This one may be even more domestic. What in the world are you going to do with that gun?"

"Don't let Aunt Louisa see it; she's looking out the window," implored Margaret, her eyes dancing. "I want to shoot when we get out of town. Put it in your pocket, please, — that's against the law, you know. You're not afraid of the law, are you?"

"I am, indeed. I've seen it work," Elliott replied; but he slipped the black, serviceable revolver into his hip pocket, and reined round to follow her. She had scrambled into the saddle without assistance, and was already twenty yards down the street, scampering away at a speed unexpected from the maligned pinto, and she had crossed the Union Pacific tracks before he overtook her. From that point it was not far to the prairie fields and the barbed-wire fences. The brown Nebraska plains rolled undulating in scallops against the clear horizon; in the rear the great State House dome began to disengage itself from a mass of bare branches. The road was of black, half-dried muck, the potent black earth of the wheat belt, without a pebble in it, and deep ruts showed where wagons had sunk hub-deep a few days before.

A fresh wind blew in their faces, coming strong and pure from the leagues and leagues of moist

4 THE TREASURE TRAIL

March prairie, full of the thrill of spring. Riding a little in the rear, Elliott watched it flutter the brown curls under Margaret's grey felt hat, creased in rakish affectation of the cow-puncher's fashion. Now that he was about to lose her, he seemed to see her all at once with new eyes, and all at once he realized how much her companionship had meant to him during these past six months in Lincoln, — a half-year that had just come to so disastrous an end.

Margaret Laurie lived with her aunt on T Street, and gave lessons in piano and vocal music at seventy-five cents an hour. Her mother had been dead so long that Elliott had never heard her mentioned; the father was a Methodist missionary in foreign parts. During the whole winter Elliott had seen her almost daily. They had walked together, ridden together, skated together when there was ice, and had fired off some twenty boxes of cartridges at pistol practice, for which diversion Margaret had a pronounced aptitude as well as taste. She had taught him something of good music, and he confided to her the vicissitudes of the real estate business in a city where a boom is trembling between inflation and premature extinction. It had all been as stimulating as it had been delightful; and part of its charm lay in the fact that there had always been the frankest camaraderie between them, and

nothing else. Elliott wished for nothing else; he told himself that he had known enough of the love of women to value a woman's friendship. But on this last ride together he felt as if saturated with failure — and it was to be the last ride.

Margaret broke in upon his meditations. "Please give me the gun," she commanded. "And if it's not too much trouble, I wish you'd get one of those empty tomato-cans by the road."

"You can't hit it," ventured Elliott, as he dismounted and tossed the can high in the air. The pistol banged, but the can fell untouched, and the pinto pony capered at the report.

"Better let me hold your horse for you," Elliott commented, with a grin.

"No, thank you," she retorted, setting her teeth. "Now, — throw it up again."

This time, at the crack of the revolver, the can leaped a couple of feet higher, and as it poised she hit it again. Two more shots missed, and the pinto, becoming uncontrollable, bolted down the road, scattering the black earth in great flakes. Elliott galloped in pursuit, but she was perfectly capable of reducing the animal to submission, and she had him subjected before he overtook her.

"It's easier than it looks," Margaret instructed him, kindly. "You shoot when the can poises to fall, when it's really stationary for a second."

6 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Thank you — I've tried it," Elliott responded, as they rode on side by side, at the easy lope of the Western horse. The wind sang in their ears, though it was warm and sunny, and it was bringing a yellowish haze up the blue sky.

"'Weh, weh, der Wind!'"

hummed Margaret, softly.

"'Frisch weht der Wind der Heimath zu;
Mein Irisch Kind, wo weilest Du ——?'"

"What a truly Western combination, — horses, Wagner, and gun-play!" remarked Elliott.

"Of course it is. Where else in the world could you find anything like it? It's the Greek ideal — action and culture at once."

"It may be Greek. But I know it would startle the Atlantic coast."

"I don't care for the Atlantic coast. Or — yes, I do. I'm going to tell you a great secret. Do you know what I've wanted more than anything else in life?"

"Your father must be coming home from the South Seas," Elliott hazarded.

"Dear old father! He isn't in the South Seas now; he's in South Africa. No, it isn't that. I'm going to Baltimore this fall to study music. I've been arguing it for weeks with Aunt Louisa. I wanted to go to New York or Boston, but she said

the Boston winter would kill me, and New York was too big and dangerous. So we compromised on Baltimore."

"Hurrah!" said Elliott, with some lack of enthusiasm. "Baltimore is a delightful town. I used to be a newspaper man there before I came West and became an adventurer. I wish I were going to anything half so good."

"You're not leaving Lincoln, are you?" she inquired, turning quickly to look at him.

"I'm afraid I must."

"When are you going, and where?" she demanded, almost peremptorily.

"I don't exactly know. I had thought of trying mining again," with a certain air of discouragement.

Margaret looked the other way, out across the muddy sheet of water known locally as Salt Lake, where a flock of wild ducks was fluttering aimlessly over the surface; and she said nothing.

"I suppose you know that the bottom's dropped out of the land boom in Lincoln," Elliott pursued. "I've seen it dropping for a month; in fact, there never was any real boom at all. Anyhow, the real estate office of Wingate Elliott, Desirable City Property Bought and Sold, closed up yesterday."

"You don't mean that you have —"

"Failed? Busted? I do. I've got exactly eighty-two dollars in the world."

She began to laugh, and then stopped, looking at him half-incredulously.

"You don't appear to mind it much at least."

"No? Well, you see it's happened so often before that I'm used to it. Good Lord! it seems to me that I've left a trail of ineffectual dollars all over the West!"

"You do mind it—a great deal!" exclaimed Margaret, impulsively putting a hand upon his bridle. "Please tell me all about it. We're good friends—the very best, aren't we?—but you've told me hardly anything about your life."

"There's nothing interesting about it; nothing but looking for easy money and not finding it," replied Elliott. He was scrutinizing the sky ahead. "Don't you think we had better turn back? Look at those clouds."

The firmament had darkened to the zenith with a livid purple tinge low in the west, and the wind was blowing in jerky, powerful gusts. A growl of thunder rumbled overhead.

"It's too early for a twister, and I don't mind rain. I've nothing on that will spoil," said Margaret, almost abstractedly. She had scarcely spoken when there was a sharp patter, and then a blast of drops driven by the wind. A vivid flash split the clouds, and with the instantaneous thunder the patter of the rain changed to a rattle, and the black road

whitened with hail. The horses plunged as the hard pellets rebounded from hide and saddle.

"We must get shelter. The beasts won't stand this," cried Elliott, reining round. The lumps of ice drove in cutting gusts, and the frightened horses broke into a gallop toward the city. For a few moments the storm slackened; then a second explosion of thunder seemed to bring a second fusillade, driving almost horizontally under the violent wind, stinging like shot.

Across an unfenced strip of pasture Elliott's eye fell upon the Salt Lake spur of the Union Pacific tracks, where a mile of rails is used for the storage of empty freight-cars. He pulled his horse round and galloped across the intervening space, with Margaret at his heels, and in half a minute they had reached the lee of the line of cars, where there was shelter. He hooked the bridles over the iron handle of a box-car door that stood open, and scrambled into the car, swinging Margaret from her saddle to the doorway.

It was a perfect refuge. The storm rattled like buckshot on the roof and swept in cloudy pillars across the Salt Lake, where the wild ducks flew to and fro, quacking from sheer joy, but the car was clean and dry, slightly dusted with flour. They sat down in the door with their feet dangling out

10 THE TREASURE TRAIL

beside the horses, that shivered and stamped at the stroke of chance pellets of hail.

"This is splendid!" said Margaret, looking curiously about the planked interior of the car. "Why do you want to leave Lincoln?" she went on in a lower tone, after a pause.

"I don't want to leave Lincoln."

"But you said just now —"

"It seems to me, by Jove, that I've done nothing but leave places ever since I came West!" Elliott exclaimed, impatiently. "That was ten years ago. I came out from Baltimore, you know. I was born there, and I learned newspaper work on the *Despatch* there, and then I came West and got a job on the *Denver Telegraph*."

"At a high salary, I suppose."

"So high that it seemed a sort of gold mine, after Eastern rates. But it didn't last. The paper was sold and remodelled inside a year, and most of the reporters fired. I couldn't find another newspaper job just then, so I went out with a survey party in Dakota for the winter and nearly froze to death, but when I got back and drew all my accumulated salary, I bought a half-interest in a gold claim in the Black Hills. Mining in the Black Hills was just beginning to boom then, and I sold my claim in a couple of months for three thousand. I made another three thousand in freighting that

summer, and if I had stayed at it I might have got rich, but I came down to Omaha and lost it all playing the wheat market. I had a sure tip."

"Six thousand dollars! That's more money than I ever saw all at once," Margaret commented.

"It was more money than I saw for some time after that; but that's a fair specimen of the way I did things. Once I walked into Seattle broke, and came out with four thousand dollars. I cleaned up nearly twenty thousand once on real estate in San Francisco. Afterwards I went down to Colorado, mining. I could almost have bought up the whole Cripple Creek district when I got there, if I had had savvy enough, but I let the chance slip, and when I did go to speculating my capital went off like smoke. The end of it was that I had to go into the mines and swing a pick myself."

"You were game, it seems, anyway," said Margaret, who was listening with absorbed interest. The sky was clearing a little, and the hail had ceased, but the rain still swept in gusty clouds over the brown prairie.

"I had to be. It did me good, and I got four dollars a day, and in six months I was working a claim of my own. By this time I thought I was wise, and I sold it as soon as I found a sucker.

12 THE TREASURE TRAIL

I got ten thousand for it, and I heard afterwards that he took fifty thousand out of it."

"What a fraud!" cried Margaret, indignantly.

"Anyhow, I bought a little newspaper in a Kansas town that was just drawing its breath for a boom. I worked for it till I almost got to believe in that town myself. At one time my profits in corner lots and things -- on paper, you know -- were up in the hundreds of thousands. In the end, I had to sell for less than one thousand, and then I came to Lincoln and worked for the paper here. That was two years ago, when I first met you. Do you remember?"

"I remember. You only stayed about four months. What did you do then?"

"Yes, it seemed too slow here, too far east. I went back to North Dakota, mining and country journalism. I did pretty well too, but for the life of me I don't know what became of the money. After that I did -- oh, everything. I rode a line on a ranch in Wyoming; I worked in a sawmill in Oregon; I made money in some places and lost it in others. Eight months ago I had a nice little pile, and I heard that there was a big opening in real estate here in Lincoln, so I came."

"And wasn't there an opening?"

"There must have been. It swallowed up all my

little pile without any perceptible effect, all but eighty-two dollars."

"And now — ?"

"And now — I don't know. I was reading a letter just now from a man I know in South Africa telling of a theft of a million in gold from the Pretoria treasury during the confusion of the war. Do you know, I half-envied those thieves; I did, honour bright. A quick million is what I've always been chasing, and I'd almost steal it if I got the chance."

"You wouldn't do any thing of the sort. I know you better than that. You're going to do something sensible and strong and brave. What is it to be?"

"But I don't know," cried Elliott. "There are heaps of things that I can do, but I tell you I feel sick of the whole game. I feel as if I'd been wasting time and money and everything."

"So you have, dear boy, so you have," agreed Margaret. "And now, if you'd let me advise you, I'd tell you to find out what you like best and what you can do best, and settle down to that. You've had no definite purpose at all."

"I have. It was always a quick fortune," Elliott remonstrated. "I've got it yet. There are plenty of chances in the West for a man to make a mil-

14 THE TREASURE TRAIL

lion with less capital than I've got now. This isn't a country of small change."

"Yes, I know. I've heard men talk like that," said Margaret, more thoughtfully. "But it seems to me that you've been doing nothing but gamble all your life, hoping for a big haul. Of course, I've no right to advise you. Nebraska is all I know of the world, but I don't like to think of you going back to the 'game,' as you call it. Do you know that it hurts me to think of you making money and losing it again, year after year, and neglecting all your real chances? Too many men have done that. A few of them won, but nobody knows where most of them died. There are such chances to do good in the world, to be happy ourselves and make others happy, and when I think of a man like my father —"

"You wouldn't want me to go to Fiji as a missionary?" Elliott interrupted. He was shy on the subject of her father, whom Margaret had seen scarcely a dozen times since she could remember, but who was her constant ideal of heroism, energy, and virtue.

"Of course not. But don't you like newspaper work?"

"I like it very much."

"And isn't it a good profession?"

"Very fair, if one works like a slave. That is,

I might reach a salary of five thousand dollars a year. The best way is to buy out a small country daily and build it up as the town grows. There's money in that sometimes."

"Why not do it, then? It's not for the sake of the money. I hate money; I've never had any. But I don't believe any one can be really happy after he's twenty-five without a definite purpose and a kind of settled life. Some day you'll want to marry —"

"Don't say that. I've been a free lance too long!" cried Elliott.

"I've always been afraid of matrimony, too," said Margaret, with a quick flush. "I want my own life, all my own."

"But what you say is right, dead right," said Elliott, after a reflective pause that lasted for several minutes. "It's just what my own conscience has been telling me." He stopped to meditate again.

"I'll tell you what I think I'll do," he proceeded, at last. "I'll go over to Omaha and look for a job on one of the dailies there. I expect I can get it, and it'll give me time to think over my plans.

"You're not going East till fall, and I can run across here often, so that I'll be able to see you. I may go East this fall myself. You've just crystallized what I've been thinking. I will do something

16 THE TREASURE TRAIL

to surprise you, and I'll make a fortune with it. Will you shake hands on it?"

She pulled off the riding-gauntlet and put out her hand, meeting his eyes squarely. The deep flush still lingered in her cheeks.

"We *are* good friends," he exclaimed, feeling a desire to say something, he scarcely knew what.

"The very best!" said Margaret, looking bright-eyed at him. "I hope we always will be. Come," she cried, pulling her hand away. "The storm's over. Let's go back."

The rain had made the road very sticky, and they rode slowly side by side, while Margaret chattered vivaciously of her own future, of her music, of the coming winter in the East. She was full of plans, and Elliott sunk his own perplexities to share in her enthusiasm. He was himself imbued with the cheerfulness that comes of good resolutions, whose difficulties are yet untried.

"When are you going to Omaha?" she asked him, as he left her at the gate.

"In a couple of days. I'll see you, of course, before I go."

He packed his two trunks that night. He did not see her again, however, for she happened to be out when he called to make his farewell. He was unreasonably annoyed at this disappointment, and thought of delaying his departure another day,

but he was afraid that she would consider it weak. Anyhow, he expected to be back in Lincoln within a fortnight, and he left that night for Omaha.

The next couple of days he spent in a round of visits to the offices of the various Omaha newspapers. He found every staff filled to its capacity. There was a prospect of a vacancy in about a month, but it was too long to wait, and, happening to hear that the *St. Joseph Post* was looking for a new city editor, he went thither with a letter of introduction from the manager of the *Omaha Bee*.

CHAPTER II.

THE OPEN ROAD

"THAT's number eighteen, and the red," said the croupier behind the roulette-table, raking in the checks that the player had scattered about the checkered layout. Round went the ball again with a whirr, though there were no fresh stakes placed.

In fact, Elliott had no more to place. The stack of checks he had purchased was exhausted, and he had no mind to buy more. He slid down from the high stool and stepped back, and with the fever of the game still throbbing in his blood, he watched the little ivory ball as it spun. It slackened speed; in a moment it would jump; and Elliott suddenly felt — he *knew* — what the result would be. He thrust his hand into his pocket where a crumpled bill lingered, and it was on his lips to say "Five dollars on the single zero, straight," when the ball tripped *ou* a barrier and fell.

"That's the single zero," said the croupier, and spun the ball again.

Elliott turned away, shrugging his shoulders.

"That's enough for me to-night," he remarked, with an affectation of unconcern. He had no luck; he could predict the combinations only when he did not stake.

The sleepy negro on guard drew the bolt for him to pass out, and he went down the stairs to the precipitous St. Joseph streets, at that hour, silent and deserted. It was a mild spring night, and the air smelled sweet after the heavy atmosphere of the gaming-rooms. A full moon dimmed the electric lights, and his steps echoed along the empty street as he walked slowly toward the river-front, where the muddy Missouri rolled yellow in the sparkling moonlight.

As the coolness quieted his nerves he was filled with sickening disgust at his own folly and weakness. "Why had he done it?" he asked himself. He had never been a gambler, in the usual sense of the word. His ventures had always been staked upon larger and more vital events than the turn of a card or of a wheel, but after finding that he had come to St. Joseph upon a fruitless quest, after all, he had gone to the gaming-rooms with one of the *Post's* reporters, who was showing him the town. In his depression and weariness and curiosity he had begun to stake small sums and to win. He remembered scarcely anything more. He had won largely; then the luck changed. He had sat

20 THE TREASURE TRAIL

down at the table with nearly seventy dollars. How much was left?

He had reached the bottom of the street, and, crossing the railway tracks, he walked out upon the long pier that extends into the river and sat down upon a pile of planks. A freight-train outbound for St. Louis shattered the night as it banged over the noisy switches, and then silence fell again upon the yellow river. In the unsleeping railway-yards to the east there was an incessant flash and flicker of swinging lanterns.

He turned out his pockets. There was the five-dollar bill that he had saved from the wheel, and a quantity of loose silver, — eighty-five cents. With a lively emotion of pleasure he discovered another folded five-dollar bill in his pocketbook which he had not suspected. Ten dollars and eighty-five cents was the total amount. It was all that was left of his former capital, or it was the nucleus of his new fortunes, as he should choose to consider it.

At the memory of the promises he had made scarcely a hundred hours ago to Margaret Laurie, he shivered with shame and self-reproach, and in his remorse he realized more clearly than ever the truth of her words. He was wasting his life, his time, and his money; and already the endless chase of the rainbow's end began to seem no longer desirable. In an access of gloom he foresaw years and years

of such unprofitable existence as he had already spent, alternations of impermanent success and real disaster, of useless labour, of hardship that had lost its romance and come to be as sordid as poverty, and for the sum of it all, Failure. The fitful fever of such a life could have no place for the quiet and graceful pleasures that he had almost forgotten, but which seemed just then to lie at the basis of happiness and success; and suddenly in his mind there arose a vision of the old city on the Chesapeake Bay, its crooked and narrow streets named after long dead colonial princes, its shady gardens, the Southern indolence, the Southern quiet and perfume.

That was what Margaret was going, and there perhaps he had what he should have clung to; and, as he turned this matter over in his mind, he remembered another fact of present importance. One of the men with whom he had worked on the *Baltimore Mail* had within the last year become its city editor. He had written offering Elliott a position should he want it, but Elliott had never seriously considered the proposition.

Now, however, he jumped at it. "The West's too young for me," he reflected. "I'd better get out of the game." He would write to Grange for the job that night, and he would be in Baltimore long before Margaret would arrive there. No, he

22 THE TREASURE TRAIL

would start for the East that night without writing, — and then he was chilled by the memory of his reduced circumstances. A ticket to Baltimore would cost thirty-five dollars at least.

But the Westerner's first lesson is to regard distance with contempt. Elliott had travelled without money before, but it was where he knew obliging freight conductors who would give him a lift in the caboose, while between the Mississippi and the Atlantic was new ground to him. Nevertheless he was unable to bring himself to regard the thousand odd miles as a real obstacle. He could walk to the Mississippi if he had to; it would be no novelty. Once on the river he could get a cheap deck passage to Pittsburg, or he might even work his passage. Probably, however, he could get a temporary job in St. Louis which would supply expenses for the journey. As for his baggage, it would go by express C. O. D., and he could draw enough advance salary in Baltimore to pay for it.

As he walked back to his hotel, he felt as if he were already in Baltimore, regardless of the long and probably hard road that had first to be travelled. That part of it, indeed, struck him rather in the light of a joke. A few rough knocks were needed to seal his good resolutions firmly this time, and the tramp to the Mississippi would be a sort of penance, a pilgrimage.

He debated whether to write to Margaret, and decided that he had better not. It would not be pleasant to confess; at least it would be preferable to wait until he was launched upon the new and industrious career which he had planned. He would write from Baltimore, not before.

That night he laid out his roughest suit, and it was still early the next morning when he tramped out of St. Joseph. His baggage was in the hands of the express company, and he carried no load; despite his penury he preferred to buy things than to "pack" them. He followed the tracks of the Burlington Railroad with the idea that this would give him a better and straighter route than the highway, as well as a greater certainty of encountering villages at regular intervals. He was unencumbered, strong, and hopeful, and he rejoiced, smoking his pipe in the cool air, as he left the last streets behind, and saw the steel rails running out infinitely between the brown corn-fields and the orchards, straight into the shining West.

For a long time Elliott remembered that day as one of the most enjoyable he ever spent. It was warm enough to be pleasant; the track, ballasted heavily with clay, made a delightfully elastic foot-path; on either side were pleasant bits of woodland dividing the brown fields where the last year's corn-stalks were scattered, and farmhouses and orchards

24 THE TREASURE TRAIL

clustered on the rolling slopes. Where they lay beside the track the air was full of the hoarse "booming" of doves; and, after the rawness of the treeless plains, this seemed to Elliott a land of ancient comfort, of long-founded homesteads, and all manner of richness.

He had intended to ask for dinner at one of the farmhouses, where they would charge him only a trifle, but he developed a nervous fear of being taken for a tramp. Again and again he selected a house in the distance where he resolved to make the essay; approached it resolutely — and weakly passed by, finding some excuse for his hesitation. It was too imposing, or too small; it looked as if dinner were not ready, or as if it were already over; and all the time hunger was growing more acute in his vitals. About one o'clock, however, he came to a little village, just as his appetite was growing uncontrollable. He cast economy to the dogs, went to the single hotel, washed off the dust at the pump, and fell upon the hot country dinner of coarse food supplied in unlimited quantity. It cost twenty-five cents, but it was worth it; and after it was all over he strolled slowly down the track, and finally sat down in the spring sun and smoked till he softly fell asleep.

He was awakened by the roar of an express-train going eastward, and it occurred to him that his bag-

gage must be aboard that train, travelling in ease while its owner plodded between the rails. It was after two o'clock, he had rested long enough, and he returned to the track and took up the trail again.

At sunset he reached Hamilton, and his time-table folder indicated that he had travelled twenty-seven miles that day. At this rate he would reach the Mississippi in less than a week, and he felt only an ordinary sense of healthy fatigue and an extraordinary appetite.

He was charged a quarter for supper that evening at a farmhouse, and before dark he had reached the next village. There was a bit of woodland nearby where he imagined that he could encamp, and as it had been a warm day he thought a fire would be unnecessary. So in the twilight he scraped together a heap of last year's leaves, and spread his coat blanket-wise over his shoulders. It reminded him of many camps in the mountains, and he went to sleep almost at once, for he was very tired.

A sensation of extreme cold awoke him. It was dark; the stars were shining above the trees, and, looking at his watch by a match flare, he learned that it was a quarter to twelve. But the cold was unbearable; he lay and shivered miserably for half an hour, and then got up to look for wood for a fire. In the darkness he could find nothing, and, thoroughly awake by this time, he abandoned the

26 THE TREASURE TRAIL

camp and went back through the gloom to the railway station, where half a dozen empty box cars stood upon the siding. Clambering into one of these, it appeared comparatively warm; it reminded him of Margaret and of the hail upon Salt Lake, — things which already seemed very far away.

His rest that night was shattered at frequent intervals by the crash of passing freight-trains. They stopped, backed, and shunted within six feet of him with a clatter of metal like a collapsing foundry, a noise of loud talking and swearing, and a swinging flash of lanterns. Drowsily Elliott fancied that his car was likely to be attached to some train and hauled away, perhaps to St. Louis, perhaps to St. Joseph, but in the stupefaction of sleep he did not care where he went; and, in fact, when he awoke he saw the little village still visible through the open side door, looking strange and unfamiliar in the gray dawn. Grass and fences were white with hoarfrost.

At five o'clock that afternoon Elliott was twenty-two miles nearer the Mississippi. He had just passed a small station. His time-table told him that there was another eight miles away, and he decided to reach it and spend the night in one of its empty freight-cars, for he had learned that camping without a fire was not practicable.

He reached the desired point just as it was grow-

ing dark. Point is the word, for it was nothing else. There was no depot there, no houses, no siding, — nothing whatever but a name painted on a nailing plank beside the track. It was a crossroad's flagstation. Elliott had failed to notice the "P" opposite the name in the time-table.

The sun had set in clouds and a fine cold rain was beginning. The sky looked black as iron. A camp in the rain was out of the question. The next village was five miles away, but he would have to reach it.

It was a dark night, but it never grows entirely dark in the open air, as house-dwellers imagine, and as he went on he could make out looming masses of forest on either hand. The country seemed to be growing marshy; he came to several long trestles, which he crossed in fear of an inopportune train.

Presently the track plunged into a sort of swamp, where the trees came close and black on both sides. The rain pattered in pools of water, and through the wet air darted great fireflies in streaks of bluish light. Their fading trails crossed among the rotting trees, and from the depths of the marsh sounded such a chorus of frog voices as he had never dreamed of, in piccolo, tenor, bass, screeching and thrumming. In the deepest recesses some weird reptile emitted at regular intervals a rattling Mephistophelean laugh. It impressed Elliott with a kind

28 THE TREASURE TRAIL

of horror, — the blue witch-fires flashing through the rain, the reptilian voices, and that ghastly laugh from the decaying woods; and he hastened to leave it behind.

It proved a very long five miles to the next station, and he was wet through and stumbling with weariness when he reached it. The village was pitch-dark; not a light burned about the station except the steady switch-lamps; not a freight-car stood upon the siding. There was not even a roof over the platform, and, too tired to look for shelter, Elliott dropped upon a pile of lumber by the track, and went heavily to sleep in the rain.

The hideous clangour of a passing express-train awoke him; he was growing accustomed to such awakenings. It was an hour from sunrise. Close to him stood the little red station and a great water-tank. The village was still asleep among the dripping trees. Not a smoke arose from any chimney.

It had stopped raining, and the east was clearer. Elliott was wet through, cold and stiff, and he found his feet sore and swollen. He was not in training for so much pedestrian exercise, and he had overdone it.

But the solitary hotel of the village awoke early, and Elliott did not have to wait long for breakfast. Shortly after sunrise, strengthened with hot coffee, he was renewing the march, finding every step ex-

quisitely painful. The romance of this sort of vagabondage was fast evaporating, and the thought of the seventy dollars that he had wasted in St. Joseph infuriated him.

When the sun rose high enough to dry his garments, he sat down, removed his coat, and steamed gently. After this respite the pain in his blistered soles was worse than ever, but he trudged stoically on. After an hour it grew dulled till he scarcely noticed it, and about noon he reached Redwood.

Near the station there was a small lunch-room, where Elliott satisfied his appetite, and he returned to the railway, sat upon a pile of ties, lighted his pipe, and reflected. The endless line of shining rails running eternally eastward was loathsome to his eyes.

"I've overdone it at the start. I ought to lie up and rest for a day or two," he said to himself. But even walking appeared preferable to idling in the scraggly village, and he suddenly determined that he would neither idle nor yet walk, but nevertheless he would be in Hannibal in two days.

He sat on the pile of ties for over an hour. A ponderous freight-train dragged up to the station, went upon the siding and waited till the fast express flashed past without stopping. Then the freight got clumsily under way again with a tremendous clank and clamour. At it rolled slowly past, Elliott saw

30 THE TREASURE TRAIL

a side door had opened. He ran after it, swung himself up by his elbows, and tumbled head first into the car.

The train went on, gradually gaining speed. There were loose handfuls of corn scattered about the car from its last load. Elliott slid the door almost shut and sat down on the floor, wondering if the crew had seen him get aboard.

The train was attaining a considerable speed and the car was flung over the rails with shattering jolts. Through the cranny of the door Elliott saw trees and fields sweep by, and he was considering pleasantly that he had already travelled an hour's walk, when a heavy trampling of feet sounded on the roof of the pitching car.

He listened with some uneasiness. The feet reached the end of the car; he heard them coming down the iron ladder, and then a face, a grimed but not unfriendly face, topped by a blue cap, appeared at the little slide in the end.

"Hello!" called the brakeman, peering into the dark interior. "I know you're there. I seen you get in. I kin see you now."

At this culminative address, Elliott came out of his dusky corner.

"Where you goin'?" demanded the brakeman.

"Why, I'd like to stay right with this train. It's

going my way," replied Elliott. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Dunno as I do, — but you can't ride this train free."

"Oh, that's all right," responded the trespasser. "I'm pretty short or else I'd be on the cushions instead of here, but I don't mind putting up a quarter. Does that go?"

"I reckon," said the brakeman, unhesitatingly. "This train don't go only to Brookfield; that's the division point. Keep the door shet, an' don't let nobody see you."

He went back to the top of the train. Elliott felt as if he had been swindled, for Brookfield was only twenty-five miles away. However, he hoped to catch another freight that afternoon and make as many more miles before sunset, and he settled himself as comfortably as possible on the jolting floor and lighted his pipe.

He had time to smoke many pipes before reaching Brookfield, for it was nearly two hours before the heavy train rolled into the yards. Elliott climbed out upon the side-ladder and swung to the ground before the train stopped, to avoid a possible railway constable. Considerably to his surprise, he saw half a dozen rusty-looking vagrants hanging to the irons and jumping off at the same time. He had had more fellow passengers than he had sus-

32 THE TREASURE TRAIL

pected, and it struck him that freight-breaking must be rather a lucrative employment.

All the rest of that afternoon Elliott watched the freight-yards, but, though some trains departed eastward, they appeared to contain no empty cars. After supper he returned to the railroad, and remained there till it grew dark. Trains came and went; there were engines hissing and panting without cease; all the dozen tracks were crowded with cars, and up and down the narrow alleys between them hastened men with lanterns, talking and swearing loudly. The crash and jar of coupling and shunting went on ceaselessly, and this activity did not lessen, and the night passed, for Brookfield was one of the "division points" on the main line of a great railroad.

It was nearly midnight when Elliott observed that a train was being made up with the caboose on the western end. He walked its length; the switchmen paid no attention to him, and he discovered an empty box car about the middle of the train, and into it he climbed without delay. For another half-hour, however, the manipulation of the cars continued, with successive violent shocks as fresh cars were coupled on. The whole train seemed to be broken and shuffled in the darkness, and it was hauled up and down till Elliott began to doubt whether it were going ahead at all. But

at last he heard the welcome two blasts from the locomotive ahead, and in another minute the long train was labouring out.

This time he suffered no interference from any brakeman. The train was a fast freight; it made no stop for nearly two hours, and then continued after the briefest delay. The speed was high enough to make the springless car most uncomfortable, till the jolts seemed to shake the very bones loose in Elliott's body. Every position he tried seemed more uncomfortable than the last, but he was determined to stay with the train as far as it went. After a few hours of being tossed about, he became somewhat stupefied, and even dozed a little, and between sleep and waking the night passed. In the first gray of morning the train pulled up at the great water-tank at Palmyra Junction, fifteen miles from Hannibal. He had travelled ninety miles that night.

The train went no farther. After waiting an hour or two for another, Elliott decided to walk the rest of the way, and he left Palmyra at nine o'clock, arriving in Hannibal, very tired and dusty, at a little after three. At the bottom of the long street he caught a glimpse of the broad Mississippi rolling yellow between its banked levees. The first stage of the journey was accomplished; the next would be upon the river.

CHAPTER III.

THE ADVENTURER

WHEN he went down to the levee an hour or two later, Elliott found no boats preparing to sail, and a general lack of activity about the steamer wharves. Sitting upon a stack of cotton-bales, he perceived a young man of rather less than his own age, smoking with something of the air of a busy man who finds a moment for relaxation. He was very much tanned; he wore a flannel shirt and a black tie, and his clothes were soiled with axle-grease and coal-dust. By these tokens Elliott recognized that he had been for some time in contact with the railways, but he did not look like a railway man, and his face wore a bright alertness that distinguished it unmistakably from that of the joyless hobo. Elliott took him for an amateur vagrant like himself.

"Seems to be nothing doing on the river. Do you know when there's a boat for St. Louis?" he asked, pausing beside the cotton-bales.

The loungee took stock of Elliott, keenly but with good nature.

"There ought to be one leaving about six o'clock, but I don't see any sign of her yet," he responded. "Going down the river?"

"I thought I'd try it. Do you reckon the mate would take me on, even if it was only to work my passage?"

"What do you want to do that for?" queried the other, with a sort of astonished amusement.

"Why, I wanted to get to St. Louis, and after that up to Pittsburg or Cincinnati."

"If you want to get there easy, and get there alive, I don't see why you don't swim," remarked the stranger, dryly. "You don't know much about these river boats, do you? Man, they're floating hells. The crew is all niggers, and the toughest gang of pirates in America. They knife a man for a chew of tobacco. The officers themselves don't hardly dare go down on the lower deck after dark, — but, Lord! they do take a lot out of the black devils when they tie up at a wharf and start to unload. If you can't work for ten hours at a stretch toting a hundred-pound crate in each hand, live on corn bread, and kill a man every night, don't try the boats. A white man wouldn't last any longer in that crowd than an icicle in hell."

"The deuce!" said Elliott, disconcerted. "I'm very anxious to get to Cincinnati, anyway, and the

36 THE TREASURE TRAIL

fact is I'm sort of strapped. I thought I'd be all right when I got to the river."

"Tried freights?"

"Yes, and they don't suit me too well."

"I'm going to St. Louis," said the stranger, after a pause. "I'm going to leave early in the morning, and I expect to get there in three hours, and I don't intend that it shall cost me a cent. To tell the truth, I'm in something of the same fix as you are."

"How'll you manage it?" Elliott inquired, with much curiosity.

"Ride a passenger-train, on the top. I've just come from Seattle that way," he continued, after a meditative pause. "There's no great amount of fun in it, but I did it in six days."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Elliott again. "Do you mean to say that you came a' the way from Seattle in six days, beating passenger-trains?"

"Every inch of it. I was in a hurry, and I'm in a hurry yet. Mostly I rode the top, and sometimes the blind, and once I tried the trucks, but next time I'll walk first. The beast of a conductor found that I was there, and poured ashes down between the cars."

"You're a genius," said Elliott, looking at the audacious traveller with admiration. "That's beyond me."

"Not a bit of it. I don't do this sort of thing professionally, nor you, either. Excuse me, I can see that you're no more a bum than I am. But a man ought to be able to do anything, — beat the hobo at his own game if he's driven to it. I simply had to get to Nashville, and I hadn't the money for a ticket. I did it, or I've nearly done it, and you could have done it, too.

"Of course you could," he went on, as Elliott looked doubtful. "Come with me in the morning, if you're game, and I'll guarantee to land you in St. Louis by eight o'clock."

"Oh, I'm game all right," cried Elliott, "if you're sure I won't be troubling you."

"Didn't I say that I'm going, anyway. I mighty seldom let anybody trouble me. Now look here: the fast train from Omaha gets here a little before three, daylight. You meet me at the passenger depot at, say, three o'clock. Better get as much sleep as you can before that, for you sure won't get any after it."

He glanced at Elliott with a smile that had the effect of a challenge. "Oh, I won't back out," Elliott assured him. "I'll be there, sharp on time. So long, till morning."

Elliott went away a little puzzled by his new comrade, and not altogether satisfied. The young fellow — he did not know his name — evidently

38 THE TREASURE TRAIL

was in possession of an almost infernal degree of energy. Plainly he was no "bum," as he had said; it was equally plain that he was, undeniably, not quite a gentleman; and, plainest of all, that he was a man of much experience of the world and ability to take care of himself in it. Elliott could not quite place him. He was a little like a professional gambler down on his luck. It was quite possible that he was a high-class crook escaping from the scene of his latest exploit, and it was this consideration that roused Elliott's uneasiness. It was bad enough, he thought, to be obliged to dodge yard watchmen and railway detectives without risking arrest for another man's safe-cracking.

Still, the association would last only for a few hours, and he went to bed that night resolved to carry the agreement through. He was staying at a cheap hotel, and there were times when he would have regarded its appointments as impossible, but it struck him just now that he had never known before what luxury was. It was four nights since he had slept in a bed, and, as he stretched himself luxuriously between the sheets, the idea of getting up at three o'clock seemed a fantastic impossibility.

A thundering at the door made it real, however. He had left orders at the desk to be called, and he pulled his watch from under the pillow. There

was no mistake; it was three o'clock, and, shivering and still sleepy, he got up and lighted the gas.

Near the water-front he found an all-night lunch-room, and hot coffee and a sandwich effected a miraculous mental change. With increasing cheerfulness he went on toward the depot through the deserted streets. It was still dark and the stars were shining, but there was an aromatic freshness in the air, and low in the east a tinge of faintest pallor.

He found his prospective fellow traveller lounging about the triangular walk that surrounds the depot, and saluted him with a flourish of his pipe-stem. An almost imperceptible grayness was beginning to fill the air, and sparrows chirped in the blackened trees about the station.

"She'll be along in a few minutes," said the expert, referring to the train. "By the way, my name's Bennett; what'll I call you? Any old name'll do."

"Call me Elliott. That happens to be my real name, anyway. But say, won't it be a little too light soon for us to sit up in plain sight on the roof of that train?"

"A little. But she doesn't make any stop all the way to St. Louis, I believe, and of course the people on board can't see us. It's easier to climb

40 THE TREASURE TRAIL

up there by daylight, too, and — there she whistles.”

The few early passengers hurried out upon the platform. In half a minute the train rolled into the station, its windows closely curtained and the headlight glaring through the gray dawn. The passengers went aboard; there was no demand for tickets at the car steps, and Bennett and Elliott went straight to the smoker, where they sat quietly till the train started again, after the briefest delay.

“Now come along,” muttered Bennett, and Elliott followed him across the platforms and through the three day coaches full of dishevelled, dozing passengers. The Pullmans came next, and luckily the juncture was not vestibuled.

Without the slightest hesitation Bennett climbed upon the horizontal brake-wheel, and put his hands on the roof of the sleeper. Then with a vigorous spring he went up, crept to a more level portion of the roof, and beckoned Elliott to follow him.

The train was now running fast, and the violent oscillation of the cars made the feat look even more difficult and dangerous than it was. But the idea that the conductor might come through and find him there stimulated Elliott amazingly, and he clambered nervously upon the wheel, and got his hands upon the grimy roof that was heav-

ing like a boat on a stormy sea. Securing a firm hold, he attempted to spring up, but a violent lurch at that moment flung him aside, and he was left dangling perilously till Bennett scrambled to his relief and by strenuous efforts hauled him up to more security.

A furious blast of smoke and cinders struck his face. Before him writhed the dark, reptilian back of the train, ending in the locomotive, that was just then wreathed in a vivid glare from the opened firebox. From that view-point the engine seemed to leap and struggle like a frenzied horse, and all the cars plunged, rolling, till it appeared miraculous that they did not leave the rails. Even as he lay flat on the roof of the bucking car it was not easy to avoid being pitched sideways. The cinders came in suffocating blasts with the force of sleet, and presently, following Bennett's example, Elliott turned about with his head to the rear and lay with his face buried in his arms. The roar of the air and of the train made speech out of the question.

The position had its discomforts, but it seemed an excellent strategic one. An hour went by, and it was now quite light. The fast express continued to devour the miles with undiminished speed.

Little sleeping villages flashed by, as Elliott saw occasionally when he ventured to raise his head.

42 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Two hours; they were within forty miles of St. Louis, when the train unexpectedly slackened speed and came to a stop.

Elliott jumped to the conclusion that it had stopped for the sole purpose of putting him off, but he observed immediately that it was to take water. He glanced at Bennett, who was looking about with an air of disgusted surprise.

There were men about the little station, and the trespassers flattened themselves upon the car roof, hoping to escape notice, but some one must have seen them. A gold-laced brakeman presently thrust his head up from below, mounted upon the brake-wheel.

"Come now, get down out of that!" he commanded.

His conductor was looking on, and there was no possibility of coming to an arrangement with him. Elliott slid down to the platform, much crestfallen, followed by Bennett. Cinders fell in showers from their clothing as they moved, and a number of passengers watched them with unsympathetic curiosity as they walked away.

"By thunder, I hate to be ditched like that!" muttered Bennett, glancing savagely about. "Let's try the blind baggage, if there is one. We'll beat this train yet."

Elliott doubted the wisdom of this second at-

tempt, but they went forward, looking for the little platform, usually "blind," or doorless, which is to be found at the front end of most baggage-cars. It was there; none of the crew appeared to be looking that way, and they scrambled aboard just as the train started.

It was a much more comfortable position than the top, for there were iron rails to cling to and a platform to sit upon, while they were out of the way of smoke and cinders. Immediately before them rose the black iron hulk of the tender and it was not long before the fireman discovered them as he shovelled coal, but he made no hostile demonstration beyond playfully shaking his fist.

"We're safe for St. Louis now. There won't be another stop, and nobody can see us or get at us while she's moving," remarked Bennett, with satisfaction. He glanced over his shoulder, turned and looked again, and his face suddenly fell. After a moment's sober stare, he burst into a fit of laughter.

"Done again! This 'blind' isn't blind at all," he cried, pointing to the car-end.

It was hideously true. There was a narrow door which they had not observed in the end of the car. Just then it was closed fast enough, but there was no telling when it might be opened.

"Anyhow," said Elliott, plucking up courage,

44 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"we're making nearly forty miles an hour, and every minute they leave us in peace means almost another mile gained."

"Yes, and there's just a chance that nobody opens this door. I think that if we stop again we'd better give this train up."

They watched the door anxiously as the minutes and the miles went past, but it remained unopened. The little stations flew past — Clarksville, Annada, Winfield. It was not far to West Alton, and that was practically St. Louis.

The end was almost in sight. But the door opened suddenly, and the brakeman they had before encountered came out.

"I told you fellows to get off half an hour ago."

"Now, look here," said Bennett, persuasively. "We're not doing this train any harm at all. We're not going inside; we'll stay right here, and we'll jump the minute she slows for Alton. We're no hobos. We're straight enough, only we're playing in hard luck just now and we've simply got to stay on this train. Now you go away, and just fancy you never saw us, and you'll be doing us a good turn."

The brakeman reflected a moment, looked at them with an expression more of sorrow than of anger, and returned to the car without saying anything.

"He's all right," said Elliott.

"And every minute means a mile," Bennett added.

But in less than a mile the brakeman returned, and the conductor came with him.

"Come now, get off!" commanded the chief, crisply.

"We'll get off if we have to," said Bennett. "You must slow up for us, though."

"Slow hell!" returned the conductor. "I've lost time enough with you bums. Hit the gravel, now!"

Elliott glanced down. The gravel was sliding past with such rapidity that the roadway looked smooth as a slate.

"Great heavens, man, you wouldn't throw us off with the train going a mile a minute. It would be sure murder," pleaded Bennett.

"I've no time to talk. Jump, or I'll throw you off." The conductor advanced menacingly, with the brakeman at his shoulder.

Bennett lifted his arm with a gesture that the conductor mistook for aggression. He whipped out his revolver and thrust it in Bennett's face. The adventurer, startled, stepped quickly back, clean off the platform, and vanished.

A wave of rage choked Elliott's throat, and he

46 THE TREASURE TRAIL

barely restrained himself from flying at the throats of his uniformed tormentors.

"Now you've done it," he said, finding speech with difficulty. "You've killed the man."

The conductor, looking conscience-stricken and anxious, leaned far out and gazed back, and then pulled the bell-cord.

"He needn't have jumped. I wouldn't have thrown him off; never did such a thing in my life," he muttered.

"He didn't jump. You assaulted him, when all he wanted was to get off quietly. You pulled your gun on him, when neither of us was armed. It's murder, and you'll be shown what that means."

Elliott felt that he had the moral supremacy. The conductor made no reply, and the train came to a stop.

"You'd better go back and look after your partner," he said, in a subdued manner. "I'm mighty sorry. I'd never have hurt him if he'd stayed quiet. It's only a couple of miles to Alton," he added, as Elliott jumped down, "and you can take him into St. Louis all right, if he isn't hurt bad. I'd wait and take you in myself if I wasn't eighteen minutes late already."

The train was moving ahead again before Elliott had reached its rear. He ran as fast as he could,

and while still a great way off he was relieved to see Bennett sitting up among the weeds near the fence where he had been pitched by the fall. He was leaning on his arms and spitting blood profusely.

"Are you hurt much, old man? I thought you'd be killed!" cried Elliott, hurrying up.

Bennett looked at him in a daze. His face was terribly cut and bruised with the gravel, and the blood had made a sort of paste with the smoke-dust on his cheeks. His clothes were rent into great tatters.

"Don't wait for me," he muttered, thickly. "Go ahead. Don't miss the train. I'm — all right."

But his head drooped helplessly, and he sank down. The ditch was full of running water, and Elliott brought his hat full and bathed the wounded man's head and washed off the blood and grime. Bennett revived at this, and looked up more intelligently.

Elliott examined him cursorily. His right arm was certainly broken, and something appeared wrong with the shoulder-joint; it looked as if it might be dislocated. There must be a rib broken as well, for Bennett complained of intense pain in his chest, and continued to spit blood.

"That conductor certainly ditched us, didn't

48 THE TREASURE TRAIL

he?" he murmured. "Did he throw you off too? I was a fool not to see that door."

None of the injuries appeared fatal, or even very serious, with proper medical care, and Elliott felt sure that the right thing was to get his comrade into St. Louis and the hospital at once. But Bennett was quite incapable of walking, and Elliott was not less unable to carry him. He became feverish and semidelirious again; he talked vaguely of war and shipwreck, but in his lucid moments he still adjured Elliott to leave him.

Elliott remained beside him, though with increasing anxiety. After an hour or two, however, he was relieved by the appearance of a gang of section workers with their hand-car, to whom Elliott explained the situation without reserve. They were sympathetic, and carried both Elliott and Bennett into Alton on their car, where they waited for two hours for a train to St. Louis.

Bennett was got into the smoker with some difficulty; he remained almost unconscious all the way, and at the Union Station in St. Louis there was more difficulty. Elliott was afraid to call a policeman and ask for the ambulance, lest admission should be refused on the ground that Bennett was an outsider. So, half-supporting and half-carrying the injured man, he got him out of the station and a few yards along the street. It was

THE ADVENTURER

49

impossible to do more. A policeman came up, and Elliott briefly explained that this man was badly hurt and would have to go to the hospital at once. Then he hurried off, lest any questions should be asked.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FATE OF THE TREASURE SHIP

ELLIOTT watched the arrival of the ambulance from a distance, for he felt certain that he looked a thorough tramp, with his rough dress and the clinging coal grime of the railroad. Yet he did not wish to leave the city without at least seeing Bennett again, and hearing the medical account of his condition; and he was surprised to find how much liking he felt for this light-hearted and resourceful vagabond whom he had known for less than twenty-four hours.

Though his money was running dangerously short, he lodged himself at a not wholly respectable hotel on Market Street, and next morning he made what improvement he could in his appearance, and went to the hospital. Visitors, it turned out, were not admitted that day, but he was told that his friend was in a very bad way indeed. The young doctor in white duck evidently did not consider his shabby-looking inquirer as capable of comprehending technical details, and seemed himself incapable

of furnishing any other, but Elliott gathered that Bennett had been found to have two or three ribs broken and his shoulder dislocated, besides a broken arm and more or less severe lacerations of the lungs. He was quite conscious, however, and the doctor said that, if he grew no worse, it was likely that Elliott would be permitted to see him on the next visiting day, which would be the morrow.

At three o'clock the next afternoon, therefore, Elliott applied, and was admitted without objection. A wearied-looking nurse led him through the ward, where there seemed a visitor for every cot. Bennett, she said, appeared a little better. His temperature had gone down and he seemed to be recovering well from the shock, but Elliott was startled at the pallor of the face upon the pillow. The brown tan looked like yellow paint upon white paper, but Bennett greeted him cheerfully and seemed nervously anxious to talk.

"Sit down here. This is mighty good of you," he said. "I never got ditched like that before. Did that conductor throw you off, too?"

"Oh, no. He stopped the train for me to get off. His conscience was hurting him, I think."

"Well, it's going to cost the road something, I think. But you've stayed by me like a brother." Bennett went on, deliberately, "and I'll make it

52 THE TREASURE TRAIL

up to you if I can, and I think I can. There's something I want to tell you about. It's no small thing, and it'll take an hour or two, so you'll have to come to-morrow afternoon, and bring a note-book. We can't talk with all these visitors swarming around. They'll let you in; I've fixed it up with the doctor. They said that it was liable to kill me, but I told them that it was a matter of life and death, and they gave in. It is a life and death business, too, for a couple of dozen men have been killed in it already, and there's a round million, at least, in solid gold. What do you think of that?"

Elliott thought that his comrade was becoming delirious again, but he did not say so. The nurse, who had been keeping an eye on him, came up.

"I really think you've talked long enough," she said, with a sweetness that had the force of a command.

"All right," said Elliott, getting up. "I'll see you to-morrow, then. Good-bye."

"Will it really be all right, nurse, for me to have a long talk with him to-morrow?" he inquired, as soon as he was out of Bennett's hearing.

"No, it isn't all right, but the house surgeon has given his consent. I think it's decidedly dangerous, but your friend said it was an absolute matter of life and death, and it may do him good to get it off his mind. Come, since you've got permission;

THE TREASURE SHIP 53

and if it seems to excite him too much, I'll send you away."

Elliott felt a good deal of curiosity as to the matter which was to be confided to him for which a couple of dozen men had died already. Probably it had something to do with money—money across the continent. He had a dim apprehension that it might be about the great military accessory to some large plot.

His curiosity made him willing to take chances, however, and he wanted to see the patient the next afternoon. When it came time to go, he found Bennett propped up on three pillows, looking better. The nurse said that he really was better, that all would probably go well, but that it would be slow work, and that slow progress was sure to irritate the patient's restlessness.

"Fie!" he said when the nurse was out of the room. "What will you must do for me. I'll do anything of your way to do it, but, I'll find it worth your while. I'll go to Nashville, Tennessee, and I'll get it for you. I'll do it in a case for hurry. I can't write now and I can't telegraph. Maybe the men I want aren't there, but you can find where they are. Will you go?"

He hesitated half a moment, wishing he knew

54 THE TREASURE TRAIL

what was coming next, but he promised — with a mental reservation.

“That’s all right, then,” said Bennett, “because I know you’re square,” — a remark which touched Elliott’s conscience. “It’s quite a tale that I want you to carry to them, and I’ll have to cut it as short as I can, and you’d better make notes as I go along, for every detail is important.

“I told you how I’d crossed the country from the Coast. I had come as straight as I could from South Africa. I wasn’t in any army there; that’s not in my line. It don’t matter what I was doing; I was just fishing around in the troubled waters.

“Anyway, I had a big deal on that was going to make or break me, and it broke me. I was in Lorenzo Marques then, and it was the most God-awful spot I ever struck. It was full of all the scum of the war, every sort of ruffians and beats, Portuguese and Dutch and Boers and British deserters, and gamblers and mule-drivers from America, all rowing and knifing each other, and it was blazing hot and they had fever there, too.

“I’ve seen a good many wicked places, but I never went against anything like that, and I wanted to get back to America. The American consul wouldn’t do anything for me at all, but I saw an American steamer out in the river, — the *Clara McClay* of Philadelphia, — loading for the East

Coast and then Antwerp. She was the rottenest sort of tramp, but she caught my eye because she was the only American ship I ever saw in those waters. So I went aboard and asked the mate to sign me on as a deck-hand to Antwerp, and he just kicked me over the side.

"Anyway, I was determined to go on that ship, mate or no mate, for there wasn't anything else going my way, and I expected to die of fever if I waited. So I went aboard again the night before she sailed, and they were getting in cargo by lantern light, and there was such a stir on the decks that nobody paid any attention to me. I got below, and dropped through the hatch into the forehold. They had pretty nearly finished loading by that time, and pretty soon they put the hatches on. It was as dark as Egypt then, and hotter than Henry, with an awful smell, but after awhile I went to sleep, and when I woke up she was at sea, and rolling heavily.

"When I thought she must be good and clear of land, I started to go up and report myself, but when I'd stumbled around in the dark for awhile, I found that the bales and crates were piled up so that I couldn't get near the hatch. So I sat down and thought it over. I had a quart bottle of water with me, but nothing to eat, and I began to be horribly hungry.

"When I'd been there ten or twelve hours, I

56 THE TREASURE TRAIL

guess, I tried moving some of the crates to get to the hatchway, but they were too heavy. But while I was lighting matches to see where I was, saw a lot of cases just alike, and all marked with a stencil of a Chicago brand of corned beef, and looked like home. I thought it must be a providential interposition, for I was pretty near starving, and it struck me that I might rip one of the boards off, get out a can or two, and nail the case up again.

"The cases were big and heavy, and they were all screwed up and banded with sheet iron, but I had regularly got it into my head that I was going to get into one of them, and at last I did burst a hole. When I stuck my hand in, it nearly broke my heart. There wasn't anything there at all, so far as I could make out, but a lot of dry grass.

"It occurred to me that this must be another commissary fraud, but when I tried to move the case it seemed heavy as lead. I poked my arm down into the grass and rummaged around. At last I struck something hard and square down near the middle, but it didn't feel like a meat tin. I worked it out, and lit a match. It was a gold brick, and it must have weighed ten pounds."

"Solid, real gold?" cried Elliott, with a sudden memory of Salt Lake.

"The real thing. It didn't take me long to gut

that box, and I dug out nineteen more bricks, nearly fifty thousand dollars' worth, I reckoned. No wonder it was heavy. Then I looked over the rest of the cases, and they all looked just alike, and there were twenty-three of them, so I figured up that there must be considerably over a million in those boxes."

"Stolen from the Pretoria treasury!" Elliott exclaimed.

"I believe it was, but what made you think of that?"

"Never mind; I'll tell you later. Go on."

"Well, I felt pretty certain that this gold came from the Rand, of course, but who it belonged to, or why he had shipped it on this old tramp steamer was what I couldn't make out. Of course, if he *was* going to ship it on this boat, it was easy to understand that it might be safer to pass it as corned beef, but the whole thing looked queer and crooked to me.

"At first I was fairly off my head at the find, but when I came to think it over, it looked like there wasn't anything in it for me, after all. I couldn't walk off with those bricks. They might be government stuff, and I didn't want any trouble with Secret Service. So after awhile I packed up the box again as well as I could and fixed the lid.

58 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"I thought I'd lie low for awhile, and I stayed in that black hole till I'd drunk all my bottle of water and was pretty near ready to eat my boots. When I couldn't stand it any longer, I raised a devil of a racket, yelling, and hammering on the deck overhead with a piece of plank, and I kept this up, off and on, for half a day before they hauled the hatch off and took me out. It was dark night, with a fresh wind, and the ship rolling, and I never smelt anything so good as that open air.

"The first thing they did was to drag me before that same mate for judgment, and he cursed me till he was blue. He'd have murdered me if he'd recognized me, and he nearly did anyway, for he sent me down to the stoke-hold.

"I couldn't stand that. I'd had a touch of fever in Durban, and I was weak with hunger anyway, and the first thing I knew I was tumbling in a heap on the coal. Somebody threw a bucket of water over me, but it was no use. I couldn't stagger, and they took me up and made a deck-hand of me.

"This suited me all right, and the fresh air soon fixed me up. I wouldn't have minded the job at all, but for the mate. The crew were afraid of him as death. His name was Burke, Jim Burke; he was a big Irishman, with a fist like a ham, and he made that ship a hell. He nearly killed a man the first night I was on deck, and I've got

some of his marks on me yet. The captain wasn't so bad, but I didn't see so much of him. I was in the mate's watch, — worse luck!

“ But all this time I didn't forget that gold below, and I was trying to see through the mystery. But I couldn't make any sense of it till I saw the passengers we had.

“ There were four of them that I saw. Three of them I spotted at once as from Pretoria. I'd seen the office-holding Boer often enough to recognize him, and they always talked among themselves in the Taal. Two of them were native Boers, I was sure, but the third looked like some sort of German. Besides these fellows, there was a middle-aged Englishman that looked like a missionary, and I heard something of another man who never showed himself, but I didn't pay any attention to any one but the Boers.

“ Because when I saw them, I saw through the whole thing. The war was going well for the Boers just then, but there were plenty of them wise enough to see that they couldn't fight England to a finish, and crooked enough to try to feather their nests while they had a chance. Pretoria was all disorganized with the war-fever; half the government was at the front, and I'd heard of the careless ways they handled the treasury at the best of times.”

60 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"You were right," said Elliott. "I happen to know something about it." And he imparted to Bennett the story of the official plundering which the mine superintendent in the Rand had written to him.

"Well, I thought that must have been it," went on Bennett. "I wondered if the officers of the steamer knew the gold was there, but I didn't think so. I was sure they didn't, — not if the Boer was as 'slim' as he ought to be. I wouldn't have trusted a box of cigars to that crowd.

"But all this detective work didn't put me any forwarder, and the mate kept me from meditating too much. The boat was the worst old scow I ever saw. Twelve knots was about her best speed, and then we always expected the propeller to drop off, and she rolled like an empty barrel when there was the slightest sea. I'm no sailor, and that was the first time I'd ever bunked with the crew, but I could see easy enough that she was rotten.

"For the first few days the weather was pretty fair, but on the fourth after I came on deck it turned rougher. There wasn't very much wind, but a heavy swell, as if there was a big gale somewhere out in the Indian Ocean. It was the sixth day from port, and I reckoned that we must be getting pretty well through the Mozambique Channel.

THE TREASURE SHIP 61

"It came on cloudy that evening, and when I came on deck it was dark as pitch and raining hard. There was a light, cool south wind with a tremendous black swell. The big oily rollers hoisted her so that the screw was racing half the time, and every little while she'd take it green, with an awful crash. Everybody was in oilskins but me, and I hadn't any.

"The mate was on the bridge, and it wasn't long before we found out that he was drunk, and he must have had a bottle up there with him, for he kept getting drunker. Once in awhile he'd come down and raise Cain, and then go back and curse us from up there till everybody was in a blue fright. We didn't know what he might do with the ship, and the watch below came on deck without being called.

"Just a little before six bells struck, I heard a yell, and I found that he'd pitched the helmsman clear off the bridge, and taken the wheel himself. That part of the channel is full of reefs and islands, and we heard surf in about half an hour, — straight ahead the breakers sounded, and the mate appeared to be running her dead on them.

"Three or four of the men made a rush for the bridge to take the wheel away from him, and some one went down to call the captain. But before the mutineers were half-way up the iron ladder, the

62 THE TREASURE TRAIL

mate had his pistol out, and shot the top man through the head, and he knocked down the rest as he fell. By this time we could see the surf, spouting tall and white like geysers, but it was too dark to see the land. The captain came on deck, half-dressed and looking wild, but he was hardly up when the mate gave a whoop, rang for full speed ahead, and ran her square on the reef.

"She struck with a bang that seemed to smash everything on board. I was pitched half the length of the deck, it seemed to me, and next minute a big roller picked her up and lifted her over the reef and set her down hard, with another terrific bump.

"When we'd picked ourselves up we couldn't see anything at all, and the spray was flying over us in bucketfuls. The steam was blowing off, all the lights had gone out, and the old boat was lying almost on her port rails, shaking like a leaf at every big sea. Still there didn't seem to be much danger of her breaking up right away, and we settled down after awhile to wait for daylight.

"When the light came back we saw that we were up against a long, barren island, about half a mile across I should think, with one rocky hill, and no trees, no natives, nor anything. We were stuck on a bunch of reefs nearly a mile from shore, and we were half-full of water. When we looked her over, we found that she was cracking in two,

so we got ready to launch the boats. Two of the men were missing, and we never saw any more of the captain; we supposed that they had been pitched overboard when she struck. The mate had been knocked off the bridge and appeared to be hurt. He was lying groaning against the deck-house, but nobody paid any attention to him.

"We got one of the starboard boats into the water with six men in it, and it was smashed and swamped against the side before it was fairly afloat. We threw lines and things, but only fished out one of the crew. I got into the second boat myself, and we managed to fend off from the ship, and got on pretty well till we came close to the shore. It was a bad landing-place when there was any sea running, but we tried it, and piled her all up in the surf. I got tossed on shore somehow, — I don't know how, — but presently I found myself half in the water and half out, with a bleeding crack in my head, and most of the skin scraped off my arms and legs. I looked for the rest of the boat's crew, but none of them came ashore — alive, that is.

"In about half an hour I saw them put another boat overboard, but this one shared the fate of the first, and I don't think anybody was saved. There was still too much sea running to launch boats.

"I lay around on the shingle in a sort of silly state from the crack on my head, waiting for some

64 THE TREASURE TRAIL

one to come and find me, but nobody came. About noon, I guess, I saw another boat skimming round the corner of the island with a sail set, and four or five men in her. I tried to signal her, but she went out of sight, and that was the last I saw of any of the people of the *Clara McClay*.

"Everybody seemed to be off the ship, and it looked like I was the only one to get to the island. That night the wind and sea got up tremendously; the spray flew clean over the island, and I got up on the hill to keep from being washed off. In the morning I saw that the ship had cracked right open and broken in two, with her stern sticking on the rocks and the bow part slipping forward into the lagoon. All sorts of things were cast ashore that day,—but, say, there isn't anything in the Robinson Crusoe business. There was about fifty tons of wreckage and cargo scattered over the beach, but I couldn't do anything with wood and hardware, and I had all I could do to find grub enough for a square meal. Later I found more."

"Did any of the gold cases come ashore?" asked Elliott.

"Oh, no. They were too heavy. But in a day or so, when the weather had gone down, I rafted myself out to the wreck on some spars. But the forward half of the ship was sunk in about eight

fathoms; it just showed above the surface, and I couldn't get at the hold. The stern part was out of water and I rummaged around for something to eat, but everything was spoiled by the salt water.

"Well, I was on that blessed island for ten days, living mostly on salt pork and London gin, for that was about all I could find that wasn't spoiled by the sun or the water. It was furiously hot, and the only fresh water I had was a big pool of rainwater, that was drying up every day. Twice I saw steamer smokes to the northwest, and I knew that I was away out of the track of navigation, so at last I went to work and built a raft out of driftwood, and loaded all my gin and pork and fresh water on board. I rigged up a sail, and even if I wasn't picked up I felt pretty sure that I could fetch the Madagascar coast, anyway.

"But I drifted around for six days. There was a strong current and a breeze, sometimes both going the same way and sometimes not, and I don't know exactly where they carried me, but eventually an English mail-steamer sighted me and picked me up. She was going to Sydney, so I must have floated away up to the northeast of Madagascar. I told them that the *Clara McClay* had foundered at sea, gone down in deep water,

66 THE TREASURE TRAIL

so as to put her completely beyond investigation, and I thought I felt my fingers on those gold bricks.

"When we got to Sydney, I shipped on a Pacific Mail boat for the United States, and, as I've told you, I struck out at once for Nashville to pick up the rest of my party, for I knew that they were there during the latter part of the winter, and should be there yet.

"You see we always acted together, and, besides, this was too big a game for me to play alone. It would take a regular naval expedition and a lot of capital to fish up all that yellow stuff, but if I could locate the three men I was after I knew we could rustle the expenses somehow. We've been through some big deals together, mostly in Mexico and Honduras, where there's always devilment and disturbances. Well — that's all. I can't go to Nashville now, but this thing can't wait. Some one will be back after that gold if there was any one else saved from the *Clara McClay*."

"The question is, who does this gold belong to?" said Elliott.

"It doesn't belong to anybody. It was stolen, in the first place, from the Transvaal Republic. Well, there isn't any Transvaal Republic any more. Besides, it's treasure-trove — sunk on the high seas.

Don't worry about that, but listen to me. I don't know where that island is, but I think I know more than any one else alive, and you can surely locate it from what I've told you. You'll go to Nashville, and tell the boys just the story I've told you. They'll take you in on it, of course, and they'll do the square thing by me, same as if I was with them."

Bennett stopped, looking both exhausted and excited, and he fixed his unnaturally bright eyes upon Elliott with a penetrating gaze.

"I'll go," said Elliott. "certainly. Who are your men, and where'll I find them?"

"Likely at the best hotel in Nashville. Inquire at the Arcadia saloon, or the Crackerjack. If they're not in Nashville you can find out where they're gone, and follow them up. Their names—better note them down: John Henninger (he's an Englishman), C. W. Hawke, Will Sullivan. Hand me that writing-tablet.

"What's your first name?" continued Bennett, and he scrawled painfully with his left hand.

"Introducing Mr. Wingate Elliott. He's all right.
L. R. BENNETT."

"There's a package of evidence under my pillow," continued the wounded adventurer. "Pull it out."

68 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Elliott extracted a crumpled envelope, bulging with a small, hard lump. This proved to be something wrapped in many folds of soft tissue-paper, and when unrolled Elliott saw a bright, pyramid-shaped bit of yellow metal, about the size of a beechnut.

Elliott walked away from the hospital feeling a little giddy and light-headed at the sudden prospect of fortune. The enterprise was a legitimate one. The gold had belonged to the Transvaal Government, and that government was no longer in existence. Who was its owner? Was it Great Britain? But Elliott was a Democrat and a strong supporter of the independence of the South African Republics, and he could not acknowledge any claim of the Crown. At any rate, the finders of the treasure-ship would be entitled to a heavy salvage.

But at the memory of Margaret he stopped short on the street in perplexity. What would she say? This was the very sort of adventure that he had promised to avoid. If she were there; if she knew all, and if she told him to drop it, he felt a conviction that he would drop it without hesitation. But yet -- he walked on again -- this was a legitimate salving enterprise, and he had never met one which offered so fair rewards.

The gold was really no man's. No one knew

where it was; and with a chilling shock he recollected that he did not himself know where it was. But no matter; it could surely be located; and in default of any better method, they could visit every island in the Mozambique Channel till they found the bones of the unlucky *Clara McClay*.

So he wrote to Margaret that night, saying that he was going to Nashville, on the prospect of a *legitimate* — he underlined legitimate; the word pleased him — enterprise which promised money.

Naturally he said nothing about his finances; he promised to write again as soon as anything definite had happened, and hinted that he might meet her at the depot when she arrived in Baltimore. When the letter was posted he felt more at ease with himself. Almost penniless as he was, his imagination already rioted among millions, and with the yellow gleam flickering before his eyes he prepared to beat his way to Nashville.

CHAPTER V.

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS

ELLIOTT reached Nashville in two days, being lucky enough to catch a fast freight-train which carried him half the distance in a single night. For the last twenty miles he travelled on a passenger-train, paying his fare, to preclude the danger of arrest as he came into the great railway yards, and the consciousness of safety in the face of the police seemed to him almost an odd and unfamiliar sensation.

It was early in the forenoon when he walked up the incline of the ill-paved street that reminded him of St. Joseph. He inquired for the Arcadia saloon; he found it on Cherry Street, and within the swing-doors it was cool and dusky, sparkling with glass and marble, and vibrating with electric fans. Two or three prosperous-looking Southerners were sipping through straws from glasses crowned with green leaves and crushed fruit, but Elliott contented himself with a glass of beer, and asked the bartender if he knew Mr. Henninger, or where he was to be found.

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 71

"Sure," said the mixer of drinks. "He's been stoppin' at the Hotel Orleans, and I reckon you'll find him there now. If he ain't there no more, ask for Mr. Hawke, and he'll likely know something about him."

Hawke was one of the names Bennett had mentioned, and this small circumstance, or perhaps it was the beer, raised Elliott's hopes. He finished his glass, and went straight to the Hotel Orleans, which was three blocks away.

The great lobby was full of leather-covered sofas and easy-chairs, and floored with handsome mosaic, and perhaps a score of men were smoking or reading newspapers. It was clearly a good hotel, and Bennett had said that his friends would be at the best hotel in town. Elliott looked over the register, and, not immediately finding the names he sought, he spoke to the clerk, who did not take the trouble to conceal his contempt of Elliott's disreputable appearance.

"Yes," he said, curtly. "That's Mr. Henninger sitting by the window, in the gray suit."

Elliott walked over to the man indicated. He was young, probably not over thirty-five, dark-faced, strong-featured, with a suspicion of military severity and exactitude. His costume of hard gray tweed had evidently come from the hands of a first-rate tailor, and he was smoking a cigar which

72 THE TREASURE TRAIL

he never removed from his teeth, and looking through the great window with an air of reserved boredom. Elliott, as he approached, felt himself suddenly covered with a glance that was like the muzzle of a revolver.

"Mr. Henninger?" he inquired, pausing.

The man in gray looked him over for another instant, and then replied, frigidly:

"Yes."

Elliott, who did not particularly care for this reception, handed him Bennett's note without another word. Henninger took it, and as he opened it leisurely Elliott was struck by the shape of the hand that held it. It was the hand of a pianist, a hand that had never worked, white, long-fingered, thin, but looking all nerves and muscles, as if strung with steel wires.

Henninger read the note, and examined it very closely. Then he glanced up at Elliott again with a slight smile, and held out his hand.

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Elliott," he said. "Sit down. What's the matter with Bennett, and where is he?"

"He's in the hospital in St. Louis. He got rather badly hurt — by a train." There were half a dozen men within ear-shot, and Elliott thought it best to avoid details. "He was coming here to

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 73

see you when it happened. It seems there's something doing."

He looked at Henninger, who returned the glance impenetrably.

"I've a message from him, but it'll take some time to tell it. He also wished Mr. Hawke and Mr. Sullivan to hear it."

Henninger turned to a man sitting close to him, who had been listening with all his ears, much to Elliott's annoyance.

"This is Mr. Hawke."

Hawke was a younger man than the Englishman, shorter, lighter, with a pleasant face and a light boyish moustache, like Elliott's own. But there were the same hard lines about the mouth and nostrils, and the same level, aggressive gaze that Henninger possessed, so that at moments the unlike faces took on a curious similarity.

"Sullivan isn't in the city," said Henninger, "but we know where he is. It's all the same thing. But if we're going to talk we'd better go up to my room."

It was a good room, at the front on the second floor, and as Elliott surveyed its luxurious appointments he felt sure that the party must be in funds, after all. A bell-boy presently came in with a tray, a bottle, a siphon of seltzer, and a box of cigars.

In the midst of this unexpected luxury, and feel-

74 THE TREASURE TRAIL

ing conscious of his own shabbiness, Elliott told the story of the wreck of the *Clara McClay*, making reference to his notes, and at the end producing the little prism of gold that Bennett had cut from the brick. At the first mention of the treasure Elliott caught an involuntary glance flashed between Henninger and Hawke that was like the discharge of an electric spark, but neither made any comment till the tale was finished.

Then Henninger poured out a spoonful of whiskey, brimmed up the tumbler from the fizzing siphon, and sipped it slowly, meditatively.

"Confound it, what do you think?" burst out Hawke, who was wriggling with excitement.

"I think we'd better telegraph to Sullivan," replied Henninger, putting down the glass. "And I'll wire Bennett, too — without any reflection upon your veracity, Elliott. Now, look here," he went on, with increasing animation, "as it looks now, there may be a good thing in this, but first of all we don't know anything. We don't know where that wreck is. Seems to me that Bennett might have taken some kind of bearings. Now some one who knows more than we do may get there first."

"It looks to me as if that mate was up to something," said Hawke.

"Very much so. The question is, whether he got away. Bennett said he was hurt. If he did es-

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 75

cape, you can bet he'll come back, and there's been a lot of time lost already."

"Well, now," Elliott interrupted, "if you'll excuse me, I'll leave you. I'm afraid I'm embarrassing your councils, and I've got a long road to Baltimore."

"But, hold on!" ejaculated Hawke. "You're in this. Ain't he, Henninger?"

Henninger looked at Elliott again, with the same acutely penetrative scrutiny as at first, a manner not unfriendly, but coldly analytical.

"Yes, he's in it, if he cares to come in," he answered, finally. "But you must understand, Elliott, what sort of a game this is. Everything may be all right, or not. It looks to me now as if those meat-cases didn't belong much to anybody, but that much gold never goes unclaimed, and somebody is liable to turn up and want them. We may have to fight for it; they may bring in international law, though we've a right to salvage, anyway. There's a risk of imprisonment; there's risk of sudden death. We're not men that deal in the crooked; straight work, with big profits and big chances, is our line, but we're not men to stick at little things either, when there's a heavy stake up."

"It seems to me that you are trying to frighten me," said Elliott.

"I am trying to frighten you. If I can do it,

76 THE TREASURE TRAIL

we don't want you in this at all, or you'll queer the whole thing. But if you're game, if you understand what it is, and still want to come in — why, come along, and we'll be glad to have you."

"Thanks," replied Elliott. "I was just waiting to be formally invited. I've figured up all the risks already, and in my present financial state I'd take bigger risks for less money. And that reminds me that I must tell you that I can't put any capital in this scheme. I'm down to my last dollar, and I've broken that."

Hawke began to laugh. "We're all in the same boat, then. There's my pile," pulling out two or three bills, and a little silver. "I'll bet it all that Henninger can't match it."

"But," Elliott exclaimed, "this room! — and those cigars were perfectos! Do you find Southern hospitality go that length?"

"Not at all; it's pure business. Universal credit is what has made the prosperity of this great country. We came; we looked respectable, and we stayed; and as long as we keep up appearances, and spend a little over the bar, they're shy about presenting any bills too forcibly. It cuts both ways, though, for we'd have been glad to get away from here a long time ago, if we could. But we can't take away our baggage, and without our trunks we couldn't keep up appearances anywhere; without

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 77

our appearances, we might as well be hoboes, or honest workmen. A man is no better than his coat. I'm not hitting at you," he added, quickly.

"Oh, I don't mind," Elliott assured him. "I've got a trunk full of respectable raiment in Baltimore. I'll send for it." He laughed too, as the piquancy of the situation struck him. "I don't know how I'll get them out of the express office, though. What dazes me is how you fellows expect to chase this million with the capital we have. We need, goodness knows how many hundreds, or thousands. How will you raise it — borrow it? Work for it?"

"Hardly. Play for it," replied Hawke, without hesitation.

It was consistent. As Elliott looked at him, he was struck by the fact that these men never did anything but gamble, staking their fortunes or their lives with equal alacrity, generally with the odds against them, and generally with the dice loaded against them also. He had done the same thing himself, and he had promised Margaret to do it no more. But —

"We'd been thinking of something of the sort before you came," Hawke was saying. "so as to finish things one way or the other, and this decides it. We'll need a lot of money — oh, a devil of a lot. We'll have to fit out a regular expedition, hire

78 THE TREASURE TRAIL

a small ship of some sort, get diving apparatus, and all sorts of things. Five thousand dollars is the very minimum. Let's see how much we can raise."

He emptied his pockets on the table; there was a little more than fifteen dollars. Henninger, after much rummaging, produced eleven.

"I've got ninety-five cents," said Elliott. "Let it go into the pot, too."

"Good," said Hawke. "Total, twenty-seven dollars. Now, that's a sum that's of no use to any man, much less to three men. Just on general principles we might as well get rid of it, and get the agony over. But see what we can do with it; we'll just go over to Nolan's place, at the Cracker-jack, and put up our little twenty-seven on the wheel, till we make or break. Why, I knew a man in Louisville who started with a dollar and broke the game. I didn't see it myself."

"None of us ever saw those things done," remarked Henninger, who was listening with a dry smile. "But you're right, I believe. It's the only chance I see, for Sullivan can't possibly do anything for us in time. Who's to do the playing? Who's got the luck?"

"I haven't," said Elliott, with conviction. "I tried it in St. Joe."

Henninger opened a small grip and took out an elaborate morocco case. There were rows of ivory

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 79

poker chips in it, and a dainty, gilt-edged pack of playing-cards.

"A few poker hands will show who's in the vein," he remarked, and began to deal the cards.

From the first Hawke was by far the most fortunate, and when, upon the last deal, he held a spade flush without drawing it was apparent to all three that he was unconsciously in the enjoyment of a special vein of luck. With a pleasing degree of confidence in this act of divination, they handed over to him the entire capital of the syndicate. Hawke looked a little overwhelmed at the responsibility.

"We'll go up with you, but we'll leave you absolutely to yourself," said Henninger. "Play just as the fancy takes you, but play high and fast. Hit the luck before it turns; that's the only chance of making anything."

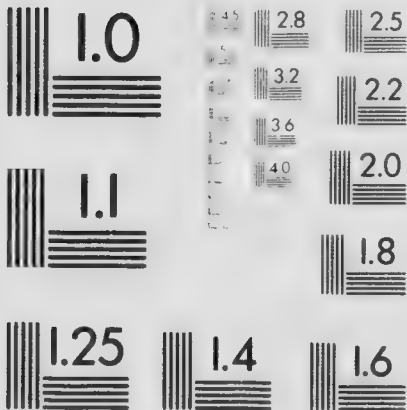
The Crackerjack's first floor was occupied by a marble and silver saloon, and above this was the gambling establishment, — an immense, cool, heavily curtained room, with shaded electric lamps above the tables that glittered with their devices in red and black and green and nickel. Overhead a dozen electric fans vibrated noiselessly.

Eight or ten players were standing in a semi-circle at the big "crap" table. Each man, as he rolled the dice, snapped his fingers violently in the



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80 THE TREASURE TRAIL

air and emitted an explosive "Hah!" which is supposed to aid in turning the winning number. Behind the table stood the suave employees of the game. They did not snap their fingers; they made no ejaculations — but they won.

The roulette-table was deserted; it is not a favourite game in the South, and the croupier was lazily spinning the ball to keep up an appearance of activity. Hawke bought twenty-seven dollars' worth of white checks and settled himself on a stool, while Henninger and Elliott walked over to the crap-table and stood looking on, to leave him entirely open to the promptings of his "vein."

They heard the sharp, diminuendo whirr of the ball begin, but they did not look around. "Whirr-rr! click!" "That's the four of hearts and the second twelve," said the croupier.

Elliott was astonished to hear a card thus called instead of a number, but Henninger explained in an undertone that, to evade the laws of Tennessee, all the roulette-wheels in the State are marked with the spots of the four suits of cards, up to the nines, instead of the usual thirty-six numbers. This naïve accommodation is supposed to satisfy at once the demands of justice and of sport, though it does not always save a gaming-house from being raided by the police.

They did not know whether Hawke had lost or

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 81

won, and they did not look, but they heard the rattle of checks, and the whirr recommence. For a time that seemed endless — perhaps it was half an hour — this went on. Henninger and Elliott tried to interest themselves in the fortunes of the crap game. They glanced over the newspapers. They walked restlessly about, smoked, peeped through the curtains at the street, tried to talk, and fell silent at every sound from the table where destiny was being spun out for them at the gay roulette.

Evidently Hawke was not yet wiped out. Was he winning? They did not know; they dared not look, listening to the whiz and click of the wheel, and dreading to see the player return suddenly empty-handed.

Finally the strain became unendurable, and Henninger turned and walked straight to the roulette-table. Elliott followed him, and bit off a half-uttered ejaculation as he caught sight of the board.

Hawke was sitting behind a rampart of stacked checks. He had trebled and quadrupled his capital already; his stakes were scattered all over the board, and just as they came up he won again with a heavy play on the second dozen numbers. There was a high flush on his cheeks; he had laid down his cigar and forgotten it, but his face was full of the bright certainty of the gambler who is playing

82 THE TREASURE TRAIL

in luck and knows it; and he placed his stakes about the layout as unhesitatingly as a stem-player.

Henninger and Elliott carefully avoided meeting his eye, and watched the spinning wheel. Click.

"The five of spades," announced the croupier.

The number had been "hit all round." There were checks on it full, and more on its corners, and Hawke built another tier of his rampart with the proceeds of the coup.

The atmosphere of the gaming-room is telepathic. The "crap-shooters" becoming aware that a "killing" was in progress, abandoned their game and came to look on in silence, some of them following Hawke's ventures with small stakes.

And still the player won. He cleared the rack of white checks and bought blue ones. With the change he was met by a reverse, and lost heavily for some minutes, but the luck returned, and he seemed in a fair way to empty the rack again.

Again and again the numbers were squarely hit. When he lost he boldly doubled his stake; he plunged recklessly on the most improbable combinations, and the ivory ball, as if he had magnetized it, spun unerringly to the chosen number. Round the table no one spoke but the croupier; no one looked at anything but the board and the gaudy wheel. Even those spectators who had no stake

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 83

in the game were as breathless as the rest. It was the sort of luck by which games are broken, and presently the proprietor Nolan himself, came up and watched the struggle, silent and grave, with a slightly worried expression.

There was another ten minutes of ill-fortune which sadly reduced Hawke's store. Henninger, anxiously following the play, wondered if the run of luck were not exhausted — whether it would not be better to leave off. But as yet scarcely four hundred dollars had been won. Win or lose, the game must go on.

Whiz — whirr-r-r — click! "It's the ace of diamonds," said the croupier, leaning over the wheel. There was a dollar check upon the winning square, and the croupier paid out the due thirty-five upon it. These Hawke nonchalantly allowed to remain upon the number that had just come up.

Round spun the ball for endless seconds. Click!

"The ace of diamonds repeats," declared the croupier. The big stake had won. The croupier was working for a salary, and the result made no difference to him, but even he was affected by the pervading excitement, and he showed it as he set himself to count out the stacks of red checks necessary to pay the heavy winning — a little less than thirteen hundred dollars.

With hands that trembled a little Hawke raked

the checks together into a solid mass upon the same number once more, and the ball recommenced its swift circling. It was the highest play that the Crackerjack had ever seen. Nolan put out his hand as if to refuse the stake, and then withdrew it again, but his eyes puckered under his hat-brim. The spectators gathered closer round; a third appearance of the ace of diamonds would win almost fifty thousand dollars, and would undoubtedly break the bank, if not bankrupt the proprietor.

"Great heavens! he's pyramiding on the ace of diamonds again!" gasped Elliott, in a fright, as soon as he understood; and Henninger turned a savage face upon him for silence. But Hawke had caught the whisper. He glanced up irresolutely, and, before the ball had slackened speed, he swept three-fourths of the checks across the table and upon the simple red. The rest, about three hundred dollars' worth, remained upon the lucky ace of diamonds.

But he had changed his play, and every gambler at the table mentally predicted disaster from the ill-omened act. A man who had been about to follow his stake with a five-dollar bill, thrust it back into his pocket.

Round spun the ball, circling the slow-moving wheel. Every eye was fixed upon the little ivory sphere that rolled and rolled as if it would never

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 85

stop — then gradually lost momentum, gravitated toward the bottom, and tripped on a barrier. The iron-nerved Henninger bit his cigar in two, and it dropped unnoticed from his lips. The ball jumped, rolled across an arc of the wheel, and dropped into a compartment with a click.

"By God, he hits it!" ejaculated a looker-on, irrepressibly.

"You win, sir. It's the ace of diamonds for the third time!" said the croupier, with a nervous smile, glancing at Nolan. "I'm afraid you'll have to cash in some of those checks. I haven't enough left to pay the bet."

Hawke nodded, but Henninger leaned forward.

"No more," he said, in an undertone to Hawke. "We're through. We've got what we needed, and more. We're a syndicate, Charley," he explained to the croupier, "and Mr. Hawke was playing for us all."

"Shut up!" said Hawke, in a feverish whisper. "This is the chance of our lives. It's the chance of our lives, I tell you. I'm going to wreck this game before I get up."

"No, you're not. You're going to stop right now," responded Henninger. "Pull yourself together, man; you're drunk. Tell him you want to cash in."

The two men glared at each other for a moment,

the one flushed, the other deadly pale, and Hawke slowly came to himself.

"I guess you're right, old man," with a nervous giggle. "How much have I won? Charley, I reckon I'll cash in."

On this last and greatest coup a thousand dollars had been won on the colour, and a trifle over ten thousand on the number, and besides this, Hawke had several hundred dollars' worth of checks from his previous winnings. Nolan himself counted the checks, stacking them back in place. The total amount was eleven thousand, seven hundred and thirty-eight dollars.

Nolan took the loss like a veteran book-maker. "I'll have to send out to the bank, gentlemen," he said. "While you're waiting, give the boy your orders."

"No, this is on us," said Henninger. "Everybody take something on our luck. Nothing but Pommery'll moisten it."

Nolan submitted gracefully. "I won't deny that you do owe me a drink. I've been in this business, here and on the turf, about all my life, but I never did see anything like that run. I was glad when Mr. Hawke cashed in — and that's no lie."

Hawke was growing as pale as he had been red, and the champagne glass trembled in his fingers. The two who had not played, suffering no reaction,

THE ACE OF DIAMONDS 87

were scarcely able to subdue their spirits to a sportsmanlike decorum. The money came, and Nolan counted it out in a thick green package—the weapon that was to win the drowned million as the twenty-seven dollars had won this. And yet, as Elliott looked at the hundred-dollar bills he felt a sudden shock of belated terror. It was only then that he realized what loss would have meant,—and it had been such a near thing!

CHAPTER VI.

THE MYSTERY OF THE MATE

ELLIOTT awoke next morning with an uneasy head and a feverish taste in his mouth, and looked vaguely around the unfamiliar hotel chamber without being able to recall how he had come there. It was only yesterday that he had been riding surreptitiously in box cars. But as his brain cleared he remembered the splendid and joyous dinner that had closed the day before, a misty glitter of glass and silver and delicious wines and cigars. That recalled his new friend and his message to them, and then the whole transformation of his fortunes flashed back upon him - the miraculous winning at roulette, the treasure trove, and, wide awake instantly, he jumped out of bed with a flush of excitement.

He found a new suit of clothes on a chair, which he now recollected having bought ready-made on the previous afternoon. They were very good clothes and fitted well, and in the inside pocket

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 89

he found a thick wad of bills. Each of the partners had taken a hundred dollars, and the rest of the money was in a sealed package in the hotel safe.

In the dining-room he found Henninger and Hawke finishing breakfast, though it was nearly eleven o'clock. Hawke looked wearied and nervous, with the rags of yesterday's excitement still clinging about him, but Henninger was as fresh, as neat, and as unmoved as ever. A few other late breakfasters at the other end of the room looked at the trio with curiosity, for the report of their coup, greatly magnified in the telling, had gone abroad; and the negro waiter served them with exaggerated respect.

In the lobby Elliott bought himself the best cigar he had ever smoked, luxuriating in the novel sense of riches, which was like a sudden relief from pain. He had never felt so wealthy in his life. The money had come with such incredible ease; the sum looked almost inexhaustible; and beyond it was the great treasure to be fished up from the African seas.

There were too many people in the lobby for private conversation, and they returned to Henninger's room.

"First of all, I vote we send Bennett a hundred dollars. I kept it out for him when I sealed the money last night," said Henninger. "I'll wire him what we've done, and then I'll wire Sullivan. I

90 THE TREASURE TRAIL

don't know that we told you, Elliott, where Sullivan is. He's in Washington, attending to a case for us. We were all in South America last winter, and we've got a claim against the Venezuelan government for damages and confiscation of property, and so i for two millions."

"What?" exclaimed Elliott.

"Two millions. We thought we might get a few thousands out of it. Anyway, Sullivan has been trying to get our case taken up at Washington, but we'll drop all that and tell him to meet us in New York."

"I'd like very much to look up that Madagascar channel on the largest map there is," Hawke broke in, "and see what we can make of it."

He voiced a common desire. Every one wanted to look at it, and they went down to the Public Library and obtained a gigantic atlas. They propped it up on a table and put their heads together over the map of East Africa. The steamer route from Delagoa Bay to Zanzibar and Suez was marked in red, and at the northern end of the Mozambique Channel it passed through a tangle of little islands and reefs.

"Comoro, Mohilla, Mayotta. St. Lazarus Bank," read Hawke, under his breath. "It must be one of these."

They all gazed at the archipelago, two thumbs'

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 91

width on the paper that represented a hundred sea leagues. Somewhere among these islands lay the treasure that had cost the lives of a ship's company already, and as he stared at the brown and yellow spots, Elliott saw in excited imagination the barren islands on the sunny tropical ocean, and the spray spouting high over the reefs where the sea-birds wheeled about the iron skeleton of the *Clara McClay*. There was the end of the rainbow; there was the golden magnet that had already stirred the passions of men on the other side of the world; and as he looked at the lettered surface of the map, he felt a sudden cold prescience of tragedy.

"Glorioso, Farquahar!" murmured Hawke. "They surely couldn't have run so far out of their course as that. St. Lazarus is my choice, and, if I'm right, we'll make it St. Dives."

"We don't know enough yet to make this any use," said Henninger, suddenly. "Let's get out."

The sight of the map and its hundreds of miles of islands and seas did in fact bring the problem into concrete reality, and forcibly emphasized the difficulties. They all felt somewhat downcast and vaguely disappointed, but, as they were going down the steps, Elliott had an inspiration.

"It occurs to me," he said, "that if anybody escaped in the boats, they must have been picked up

92 THE TREASURE TRAIL

somewhere at sea. In that case, the fact is likely to be reported in some newspaper, isn't it?"

"What have we been thinking of?" exclaimed Henninger. "You're right, of course. The New York *Herald* should have it, as she was an American ship. We'll go back and look through the files of the *Herald*, if they have them, for the last few months."

The papers were bound up by months, and each man took a volume and sat down to run through the shipping news. Elliott finished his without finding anything, and obtained another file. He was half through this when Hawke tiptoed over to him.

"Here's where Bennett appears," he whispered.

It was a four-line telegram from Sydney, stating that a seaman named Bennett had been picked up from a raft in the Indian Ocean, reporting that the American steamer *Clara McClay* had foundered with all hands in the Mozambique Channel.

There was nothing new in this, but it seemed somehow encouraging, and while Elliott was reading it, Henninger came over to them. His eyes were sparkling, and he looked as if holding some strong emotion in check. He laid down his file before them, and put his finger on a paragraph, dated more than a fortnight earlier than the despatch from Sydney.

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 93

"BOMBAY, March 19.

"The Italian steamer *Andrea Sforzia*, arriving yesterday from Cape Town and Durban, reports having picked up on the 10th about one hundred miles N. E. of Cape Amber, a boat containing First Mate Burke, of the steamer *Clara McClay*, of Philadelphia. He stated that his ship foundered in deep water in the Mozambique Channel by reason of heavy weather and shifting of cargo, and believes himself to be the only survivor. He was almost unconscious, and nearly dead of thirst when rescued.

"The *Clara McClay* was an iron steamer of 2,500 tons, built at Greenock in 1869, and has been for some years engaged in the East and West African coast trade. She was owned by S. Jacobs and Son, of Philadelphia, and commanded by Captain Elihu Cox."

The two men read this item, and Elliott, glancing up, saw his mystification reflected on Hawke's face. What new development did it indicate that Bennett and the mate should have told the same falsehood about the sinking of the *Clara McClay*, and certainly without collusion? Henninger meanwhile was carefully copying the paragraph into a note-book, and when he had finished, he gathered up the papers, returned them to the librarian's desk, and led the way out of the building.

94 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"We've got a line on it at last," he said, when they were in the open air, and there was a keen eagerness in his usually impassive voice.

"It's clear that the mate was saved, but it don't help us to find the island, so far as I can see," Hawke objected.

"Oh, the island — confound it!" as they came into the crowds of Church Street. "Let's go somewhere where we can talk." And he shut his mouth and did not open it again till they were placed comfortably in a small German café, which happened to be almost empty.

"You don't seem to understand," he then resumed. "The mate lied, — said the ship sunk in deep water, didn't he? He told the same story as Bennett. Why? For the same reason. He must have known the bullion was there, after all. He took chances on being the only survivor of the wreck, and he wanted to choke off any inquiry. There's never any search for a wreck that goes down in a hundred fathoms."

"But there were other survivors," said Elliott. "There were others in that boat with him when Bennett saw them sailing away. That must have been the mate's boat, and what became of the others?"

"Ah, yes, — what?" replied Henninger, grimly. "He was alone when he was picked up."

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 95

There was a moment's silence at this sudden apparition of the crimson thread in the tangle.

"This is the way I see the story," said Henninger. "That mate — what's his name — Burke? — knew the gold was on board. How he found out, I don't know. Whether he accidentally ran the steamer out of her course that night, or whether he piled her up intentionally, I don't know, either. He may have done it by reason of his jag, or he may have tanked up to give himself courage to carry it through. I suspect it was the latter. Anyhow, when she was smashed, he saw his chance, for he reckoned that his was the only boat to get away safe. He had several men with him, but they seem to pass out of the story. He was picked up, carried to Bombay; he lied about the wreck.

"What does he do next? Why, of course he gets ready to go back to Zanzibar or some such port and hire a craft to go to look for his wreck. If he thinks he's safe, he may lie low for awhile; or, if he hasn't the capital for the thing, he will have to hunt up some ruffians to finance him. But if he thinks that he's in any danger of being fore-stalled, he'll make haste. If by bad luck he reads of Bennett's being picked up, it'll galvanize him; and as like as not he's sailing up the channel this minute, while we're sitting here drinking lager,

96 THE TREASURE TRAIL

doing nothing — because we don't know anything!"

"Yes, but how are we going to find out anything, — where the wreck is, for example?" demanded Elliott.

"Why, from this same mate, Burke, if we can catch him. He's the source of knowledge. He knows very well where it is; if he didn't, he wouldn't have taken the trouble to lie about it. First of all, we've got to catch that mate, and when we've got him, we'll induce him to tell us what he knows. Do you remember how Casal used to interrogate prisoners in Venezuela, Hawke? We've got to get on his trail right away, and meanwhile see that he doesn't collar the cash before we know it."

"It'll be a long, wide trail," Hawke remarked.

"No. There's only one hemisphere for Burke, and only one spot in it, and that's somewhere between Madagascar and the African coast. He won't go far from that if he can help it, and wherever he goes he's bound to come back. And he'll have to come in his own ship, for there aren't any steamers plying to his island. He'll have to hire or buy a small craft on the East African coast, and there are only three ports that will serve."

Henninger sipped his beer, and meditated in silence for a little.

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 97

"My idea would be something like this. Three of us will go to South Africa at once; we pick up Sullivan in New York, of course. One of us will post himself in each of those three ports, — Lorenzo Marques, Mozambique, and Zanzibar, watching every boat that comes in, every stranger that lands, and everything that goes on along the waterfront. If Burke turns up, our man will have to use his own judgment as to how to get hold of him, — bribe him or kidnap him, or anything, but keep him there at any cost till the rest of us can come. Meanwhile the fourth one of us will go to Bombay, and try to find out where Burke went and what he did. He might possibly be there yet; anyway, he must have left some trace at the consulate or the shipping-offices."

"At any rate," said Elliott, "it appears fairly certain that no one knows anything about this ton of yellow metal but ourselves and the mate, Burke. Then there's no danger of outside interference."

"It's a fair race to Madagascar!" Hawke exclaimed.

"It's a race," said Henninger, shrugging his shoulders. "but I don't know about its fairness. We're heavily handicapped at the start. Why we're wasting time here, I don't know." He stood up suddenly, frowning, impatient.

"Sit down and finish your cigar," Hawke ad-

98 THE TREASURE TRAIL

vised him. "There's no train for New York till nine o'clock to-night."

"Yes, and there's no fast steamer for South African ports at all. We'll do best to sail for England, I fancy. Then the man who is going to India can take the P. and O., and the rest of us will go by the Union Castle Line to the Cape."

"But which of us is going to India?" Elliott inquired.

"I don't know." Henninger glanced calculatingly at his companions. "I'd like to go to Zanzibar myself, if you don't mind, because I suspect that it's the dangerous point; and Sullivan should take Lorenzo Marques, because he was there once, and he knows something of the place. The shadowing lies between you two, as far as I can see."

"I'll match you for it," proposed Hawke.

Elliott pulled out a quarter and spun it on the table, turning up tail. Hawke followed, and lost.

"I'm to be the tracker, then," said Elliott. "I'm afraid I'll make a poor sleuth. I wish Bennett had given us a description of the mate, for he has probably changed his name."

"So do I. I'd like to have time to run up to St. Louis and talk it over with Bennett. I'd like a lot of things that we haven't time for. Bennett can't write with a broken arm, so there's no use in writing to him for more details. But, as a matter

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 99

of fact, I don't really expect that you'll come up with this man Burke at all. What I do hope is that you'll find out where he went when he left Bombay, and if by chance he hired any kind of vessel anywhere, and in general what he was doing. We've got to get our information from him, there's no doubt of that."

"And what about Bennett?" Elliott inquired, after a pause. "How is he to come into the game?"

"The chances are that the game will be played before his arm's mended," said Henninger. "We'll send him a hundred, as I suggested, — or let's make it three hundred, — and of course he'll share and share alike with the rest of us. I think I'd better write him to go to San Francisco as soon as he's able to travel, if he hasn't heard from us in the meantime, and hold himself in readiness there to join us. Frisco'll be the most convenient port, and he can cable us his address as soon as he gets there."

"And I reckon we'd better telegraph to New York for staterooms," Hawke suggested. "The east-bound steamers are always crowded at this time of year."

They sent the despatch at once to Cook's agency, asking simply to get to Liverpool or Southampton at the earliest date possible, expense being no con-

100 THE TREASURE TRAIL

sideration. At the same time Henninger both telegraphed and wrote to Bennett; and Elliott wired to the express company in Baltimore to have his trunk placed in storage for him till his return.

He had gone too far now upon the treasure trail to turn back, and indeed he would not have turned back if he could. It was really the romance of the adventure that fascinated him, though he did not think so. He told himself that it was a legitimate enterprise — he clung to the phrase — with a reasonable expectation of large profits. But in no manner could he see his way to write a complete explanation of his plans to Margaret; if he could have talked to her, he thought, it would be easy. He composed a letter to her that afternoon, however, in which he remarked negligently that he was going to India on a commission for other parties, with all expenses paid, and would probably not be back to America before autumn. At the end of the letter, forgetting his precaution, he hinted of a vast fortune which was scarcely out of reach, — an imprudence which he afterward regretted.

The party left Nashville that night, and, as the train rolled out of range of the last electric lights, Hawke drew a long breath.

"I did begin to think we were never going to get away from that town," he sighed. "It looked

MYSTERY OF THE MATE 101

like we were in pawn to the Hotel Orleans for the rest of our lives."

Henninger smiled queerly. "Since we are fairly away, I don't mind telling you," he said, "that the manager and I discussed the matter last week. I explained that we were waiting for a large remittance that was overdue, but it would certainly be here in a day or two; we expected it by every mail. He gave it four days to arrive, — then we'd leave or be thrown out. Elliott turned up on the last d' "

CHAPTER VII.

THE INDISCRETION OF HENNINGER

THERE was no time to spare in New York. The party went straight to an obscure but remarkably comfortable hotel near Washington Square, which Hawke recommended, and here they found a van waiting for them. He had come to New York upon receiving his telegram, without knowing definitely what the projected expedition was to be.

Sullivan was apparently a trifle older than Hawke, and unusually good-looking. He was smooth-shaven, rather thin-faced, and his expression in a marked degree that mingling of icy reserve and electrical alacrity that has become characteristic of a sort of typical New York manner. He was very accurately dressed, and wore a gold pince-nez. He looked straight at you with a penetrating and impenetrable eye; he spoke with an unusually distinct articulation. He seemed to be perpetually regarding the world with a faint smile that was compounded of superiority, indifference, and cynicism. In reality, his mental attitude was far from either

cynicism or indifference, but it took some time to find this out. His general appearance vaguely suggested that he might be a very rapidly rising young lawyer, and Elliott discovered later that he had, in fact, been trained for the bar.

"And now, what's this new scheme you're working me into?" he inquired.

"We'll tell you about it after dinner," said Henninger. "Did you make any progress in that Venezuela claim?"

It appeared that Sullivan had not even been able to get what he called "a look in" for his money, but it did not matter much, for in any event the claim would have been temporarily dropped. They dined that night at the Hotel Martin, and when the waiter had gone away and left them in their private room with coffee and liqueurs, Elliott told Bennett's story for the second time. Sullivan listened, smoking continual cigarettes, but as the plot developed, the same predatory glimmer stole into his eyes that Elliott had seen on the faces of his other companions.

"It's a big thing, certainly. It may prove a good thing," he commented coolly, when Elliott had done. "It's one of the sportiest things, too, that I ever heard of, but it strikes me that the odds are all on this mate you speak of. He knows where the wreck is, and we don't."

104 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Exactly; and he's going to tell us. We're bound to intercept him before he gets back to the island, and if we can get ourselves posted all along the East African coast before he arrives, the thing is almost safe. But, until then, a day's delay may cost us the whole pile. We had a stroke of luck in Nashville, and another in getting berths on the first Atlantic steamer, and if the luck only holds —"

"When do we sail?"

"On the *New York*, at noon to-morrow, for Southampton."

The next morning was breathlessly full of affairs. There was money to be changed, infinite small purchases to be made, a thousand last arrangements, and they had just time to snatch a hasty mouthful at a quick-lunch counter, and get down to the dock as the first whistle blew. The great wharf-shed was crowded, swarming and bustling about the great black wall of the steamer's side, which appeared to be actually in the shed. The lofty, resonant roof echoed with the voices and with the roll of incessant express-wagons bringing late baggage. The place was full of the harbour smell of rotting sea-water, and the noise, the movement, the excitement, increased as the last moments arrived and passed.

The deck, were finally cleared of the non-pas-

sengers, and a dozen men tailed on the gangplank. A swarm of tugs were nosing about the monster's bows. The last whistle coughed and roared, and the gap between the side and the wharf suddenly widened.

Elliott leaned over the rail with delight, as she swung out into the river, and presently began to move under her own steam. The sierra outline of New York developed into coherence, towering and prodigious, jetting swift breaths of smoke and steam into the dazzling sky. An irradiation of furious vitality surrounded it. This was the city of the treasure-finders, of the searchers of easy millions, of the buccaneers. It was the place above all others where the strong is most absolutely the master, and the weak most utterly the slave; where the struggle, not so much for existence as for luxury, reached its most terrific phase, evolving a new and formidable human type. Elliott felt himself of a sudden strangely in harmony with this city which he was leaving. The spoils to the victors — and he was going to be victorious!

The ship was full, almost to her capacity, and the four gold-seekers were scattered about in different staterooms. Elliott's room had two occupants already, and the sofa was made up for him at night. The saloon tables were crowded on the first day; then it turned cold, with a light, choppy

106 THE TREASURE TRAIL

sea and rain that lasted till the Grand Banks were passed, and half of the passengers became invisible. With the promise of fair weather they began to reappear, and on the third day the decks were lined with a double row of steamer-chairs.

During the first days of the voyage Elliott fell into greater intimacy with Henninger than with any of the others of the party. It did not take the older and more experienced man to learn all he desired to know about Elliott's vicissitudes. Elliott told it without any hesitation, making a humorous tale of it, and, though Henninger offered no confidences in return, he told Elliott curious adventures, which, if they were true, argued an extraordinary experience of unusual and not always respectable courses of life.

Although he never became autobiographical, Elliott gathered by snatches that he must have been at one time, in some capacity, connected with the British army. Later he had certainly been an officer in the Peruvian army, but his manner of quitting either service did not appear. It was with South and Central America that he appeared to have had most to do. He had mentioned cargoes of munitions of war run ashore by night for revolutionary forces, fusilades of blindfolded men against church walls, and more peaceful quests for concessions of various sorts, involving a good deal

of the peculiarly shady politics that distinguish Spanish America. Henninger drew no morals; he seemed to have taken life very much as he found it, and Elliott suspected that he had been no more scrupulous than his antagonists. At the same time he had a definite though singularly upside down morality of his own, which continually inspired Elliott with astonishment, sometimes with admiration, and occasionally with disgust.

There was a good deal of whist played in the smoking-room of an evening, and a little poker, but with low stakes. It was on the preceding passage of this very ship that a noble English lord had been robbed of four thousand pounds at the latter game, and the incident was remembered. Elliott was no expert at poker, and his friends showed no inclination for play, so that, though they were in the smoking-room every evening, it was seldom that any of them touched a card.

On the evening of the fifth day out Elliott was sitting quietly in a corner of the smoking-room with a novel and a cigar. It was nearly eleven o'clock, and the low, luxurious room was full of men, and growing very smoky in spite of the open ports. Sullivan had gone to his stateroom; Henninger and Hawke were somewhere about, but Elliott was paying no attention to anything that went on.

108 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Suddenly he became aware of a lowering of the conversation at his end of the room. He glanced up; everybody was looking curiously in one direction. In the focus of gaze stood Henninger, engaged in what seemed a violent, but low-toned altercation with a short, fat, but extraordinarily dignified blond little man who had been prominent among the whist players. One of the ship's officers stood by, looking annoyed and judicial. Henninger was white to the lips, and his black eyes snapped, though he was saying little in reply to the fat man's energetic discourse. No one else approached the group, but every one observed it with interest.

All at once, upon some remark of Henninger's, the little man hit out with closed fist, but the officer caught his arm. Elliott glanced round and saw Hawke looking on with considerable coolness, but, conceiving it his duty to stand by his friend, he got up and approached the trio.

"Go away, Elliott. This is none of your affair!" said Henninger, sharply.

Elliott retreated, feeling that he had made a fool of himself publicly and gratuitously. But he was consumed with curiosity as well as anxiety, for it struck him that this might be in some way connected with the wrecked gold-ship.

Presently the three men left the cabin together,

and the buzz of talk broke out again. Elliott caught Hawke's eye, and beckoned him over.

"What was it?" he said, in an undertone.

"I didn't catch the first of it," said Hawke. "I believe that little ass accused Henninger of being a notorious card-sharper, or something of the sort. The second mate happened to be there, and he heard their stories, and I expect they've gone to the captain now."

The curious quality of Elliott's regard for Henninger is sufficiently indicated by the fact that at this information he was filled simultaneously with indignant rage and wonder whether the thing were true. He put the question directly to Hawke, who shrugged his shoulders.

"Henninger is absolutely the best poker player I ever saw," he replied. "He's better even than Sullivan, and no man can be as good a player as that without being suspected of crookedness. Of course, I don't know all Henninger's adventures, but I'd stake anything that he's as straight as a string. He's too thoroughbred a sport."

The little blond man presently returned to the smoking-room alone, but Henninger did not reappear. Elliott waited for fifteen or twenty minutes, and then went on deck.

The spaces were all deserted, and the electric lights shone on empty chairs. It was a clear night,

110 THE TREASURE TRAIL

and the big funnels loomed against the sky, rolling out volumes of black smoke. As he walked slowly aft, he saw a man leaning over the quarter, looking down at the boiling wake streaked with phosphorescence. It looked like Henninger; drawing nearer, he saw that he was not mistaken.

"How'd it come out, old man?" inquired Elliott, sympathetically. "Hawke and I would have backed you up if you had only let us. It's an outrage —"

"Will you shut up your infernal mouth — and get away from here!" Henninger interrupted, in a voice of such savage and suppressed fury that Elliott was absolutely stupefied for a moment.

Startled and offended, he turned on his heel and walked forward nearly to the bows, and for a moment he was almost as angry as Henninger had been. He leaned over the rail and frowned at the creaming water. Perhaps he had been tactless, — but he could not forgive the ferocious rebuff that his sympathy had received. But as he stood there, the cool and calm of the mid-sea night began to work insensibly upon his temper, and he began to take a more lenient view of the offence. Glancing aft, he saw that Henninger had vanished. There was no one anywhere in sight but the officer on the bridge and a lookout on the forecastle-head; and no sound but the labouring beat of the propellers.

He remained there for some time, for he heard eight bells struck, and the changing of the watch. Presently a hand touched his shoulder lightly.

"Here, old chap, smoke this," said Henninger, thrusting a large cigar wrapped in silver foil into his hand. "I was rude to you just now, but you came on me at a bad moment. Forgive me, won't you?"

"I oughtn't to have said anything. It wasn't any of my business, anyway," said Elliott, throwing away the remains of his resentment, for when Henninger chose to be ingratiating he was able to exercise a singular charm.

"I'm glad that little fool didn't hit me," went on Henninger, slowly. "There would have been trouble. He isn't such a fool, either. His memory is excellent."

"You don't mean that — really —" began Elliott, and stopped.

"Elliott, I don't know whether you've been in hard luck often enough and hard enough to get a correct light on what I'm going to tell you. No man knows anything about life, or human nature, or himself, till he's been up against it, — banged up against it, knocked down and stepped on, — and the knowledge isn't worth having at the price.

"This was two years ago. I had just come up from Tampico, and I'd been two weeks in a Mexi-

112 THE TREASURE TRAIL

can jail because I wouldn't pay blackmail to the governor's private secretary. I had just fifty-seven dollars, I remember, when I landed in New Orleans, but I had a good thing up my sleeve, and I went straight up to St. Louis to see some men I knew there and interest them in it. Two of them came back with me to New Orleans. I was to show them the workings of the thing — it doesn't matter now what it was — and if they liked it, they were to put up the capital.

"We came down the river by boat. There's a good deal of card-playing on those river boats yet, though nothing to what it used to be, of course, and we all three got into a game, along with a young sport from Memphis, who had been flashing a big roll all over the boat. Now I can play poker a little, and our limit was low, but I hadn't any luck that day. I couldn't get anything better than two pairs, and my pile kept going down till it reached pretty near nothing. All the money I had in the world was on that table, and my future, too, for I had to keep my end up with those capitalists. I was a fool to go into the game, but I couldn't pull out. About that time I happened to feel a long, thin, loose splinter on the under side of the table. I don't think that I'd have done it but for that, but I took to holding out an ace or two, sticking them under that splinter. I was beginning to get my

money back, when — I don't know how it happened — the fellow at my left suspected something, leaned over and reached under the table and pulled out the aces.

"They don't shoot for that sort of thing on the river any more, but it was nearly as bad. I got off at the next landing. All the passengers were lined up to hoot the detected card-sharper. This fellow on board here was one of them."

The brief, staccato sentences seemed to burn the speaker's lips. Elliott could find nothing to say, and there was a strained silence. He could not see Henninger's face in the dusk, but presently he gently touched his shoulder.

Henninger started nervously. "Let's walk about a bit," he proposed in a more natural voice. "It's too pleasant to go below."

They made the circumference of the decks two or three times at a vigorous pace, and without a word spoken.

"Oh, I don't blame them — not a bit!" said Henninger, suddenly. "It's all a part of the game. We fellows are against the world at large; we don't give much mercy and we don't expect any. Only — well, I don't know, but when I go up against these people who've always had plenty of money, who've lived all their lives in a warmed house, all their fat, stuffy lives, afraid of every-

114 THE TREASURE TRAIL

thing they don't understand, and understanding damned little, and getting no nearer to life than a cabbage, — when I have to listen to those people talking honour and morality, sometimes it sends me off my head. What do they know of it? They haven't blood enough for anything worse than a little respectable cheating and lying, and they thank God they've always had strength to resist temptation. They don't know what temptation is. Let 'em get out on the ragged edge of things, and get some of the knocks that shuffle a man's moralities up like a pack of cards. Something that they never tried is to come into a strange town on a rough night, stony broke, and see the lights shining in the windows, and not know any more than a stray dog where you're going to fill your belly or get out of the rain.

“There are worse things than that, too, for when a man gets down to rock-bottom, he doesn't have to keep up appearances, and he can drop his dignity temporarily and wait for better days. But when it comes to being broke in a town where you're known, where you're trying to put through some business, sleeping at ten-cent hotels and trying to make a square meal out of a banana, and sitting round good hotels for respectability's sake, and cleaning your collar with a piece of bread, — that's about as near hell as a man gets in this world. and

he comes to feel that he wouldn't stick at anything to get out of it."

"I know," said Elliott, retrospectively.

"Of course, that's all part of the game, too. If we stuck to the beaten track, there wouldn't be any of this trouble. But, great heavens! could I settle down at a desk in an office and hope for a raise of ten dollars a month if I was industrious and obliging! Or if I went home,—but I'd suffocate in about ten days. I've got caught in this sporting life, and it's too late to get out of it, and I couldn't live without it, anyway. But there's nothing in it—nothing at all. You've got a good profession, Elliott, and I give it to you straight, you'll be wise to go back and work at it, and let this chasing easy money alone. Hawke's another case. It makes me sorry to see him. He's bright; he's got as cold a nerve as I ever saw, and he's young enough to amount to something yet, but he's fooling away his life. I expect he made some kind of a smash at home; I don't know; he's as dumb as a clam about his affairs,—and so am I generally. As for Sullivan, I don't care; he's a fellow that'll never let anything carry him where he don't want to go. But if it was any good talking to you and Hawke, I'd tell you to take a fool's advice and let grafting alone."

Elliott was at first amazed by this outburst, and

116 THE TREASURE TRAIL

then profoundly moved. It was the last thing to be expected from Henninger, but his equilibrium had been completely upset by the scene in the smoking-room, and he had not yet regained it.

"You're forgetting the *Clara McClay*. You don't propose that we give that up, do you?" Elliott remarked.

"I had forgotten it for a moment," admitted Henninger. "No, we won't give that up; and I'll tell you plainly, Elliott, that we're going to have that bullion if we have to cut throats for it. If this mate gets there first I'll run him down alone, but I'll have it. This thing seems like a sort of last chance. I've been playing in hard luck for a long time, and I've had about as much as I can stand, and this will be cash enough to retire on, if we can get it. Elliott, don't you see," — gripping his arm, — "that we've simply *got* to get to that wreck first?"

"We're all just as keen as you are," said Elliott. "You won't find us hanging back."

"Yes, I know. But you're younger, and it don't seem to matter so much as it does to me," Henninger responded in a tone of some depression, and they made several more rounds of the deck without speaking. At last Henninger approached the companion stairs.

"I think I'll go down to my bunk," he said. "It

strikes me that I've been talking a lot of gallery melodrama to-night, but that affair in the smoking-room rather got on my nerves. Don't repeat any of all this to the other boys. I've given you a lot of better advice than I was ever able to use myself. Good night."

He disappeared with a smile, and Elliott went back to the rail to smoke another cigar, filled with a painful mingling of affection and pity for this unrestful spirit. He foresaw what he himself might be like in ten years. Thus far, his memory held nothing worse than misfortune, nothing of dishonour; but dishonour is apt to be the second stage of misfortune. "Go back to work, and let this chasing easy money alone," Henninger had said, and he was right. It was the advice that Margaret had given him, and that he had vowed to take. But there was still the gold-ship, and Elliott thrilled anew with the irrepressible sense of adventure and romance.

Next morning Henninger had regained his customary equipoise, and Elliott could hardly believe his recollection of last night's conversation. Henninger gave an account of the accusation and of his defence very briefly to his friends. The captain, acting as arbiter, had ordered that Henninger should refrain from playing cards for stakes while on board, under penalty of being posted as a

118 THE TREASURE TRAIL.

sharper. On the other hand, the accuser was warned not to make his story public, as there was no corroborative evidence of its truth.

In spite of this caution, some word of the affair spread through the ship, and the rest of the voyage was not pleasant. Henninger found himself an object of suspicion; passengers were shy of speaking to him; no one was openly rude, but the atmosphere was hostile. His three friends stood by him, incurring thereby a share of the popular animosity, and Henninger came and went in saloon and smoking-room, to all appearances as undisturbed and indifferent as possible. Perhaps no one but Elliott knew how much wrath and contempt was hidden under that iron exterior, but every one of the four was glad when the hawsers were looped on the Southampton docks.

It would be two days before the first Castle liner would sail for Cape Town, and they went over to London, where the last arrangements were completed. Elliott was to make for Bombay with all speed, and he drew two hundred pounds above the price of his ticket for expenses. He was to report by cable to Henninger at Zanzibar whether he discovered anything or not. Elliott would also be notified in case of developments at the other end, though it was very possible that it might be necessary for the rest to take sudden action without

waiting him to rejoin them, and in such event the plunder was to be shared alike.

Twenty-four hours later Elliott saw his friends aboard the big steamer at Southampton, amid a crowd of army officers, correspondents, weeping female relatives, Jews, and speculators, who were bound for the seat of the still smouldering war. Elliott himself returned to London, crossed to Paris, took the Orient Express, and was hurried across Europe and the length of Italy to Brindisi, where he caught the mail-steamer touching there on her way to Bombay.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA

ELLIOTT found the atmosphere on the big Peninsular and Oriental liner different from anything he had ever encountered before. The ship was full of Anglo-Indian people, army officers, civil servants, and merchants returning to the East, and whose conversation was composed of English slang and exotic phrases of a foreign tongue. The crew were mostly Lascars of intolerable filthiness, and there were innumerable Indian maids — ayahs, Elliott supposed them to be — whom he met continually about the ship on mysterious errands of comfort to their mistresses. There were queer dishes at dinner, where Elliott made himself disagreeably conspicuous on the first evening by wearing a sack coat; and the talk ran upon subjects which he had previously encountered only in the works of Mr. Kipling.

Most of these passengers had come on board at Southampton and had settled so comfortably together that Elliott felt himself an intruder. He

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 121

was distinctly an "outsider;" and he found it hard to scrape acquaintance with these healthy, well-set-up and apparently simple-minded young Englishmen, who seemed too candid to be natural. It was even more impossible to know how to approach the peppery veterans, who nevertheless were seen to converse jovially enough with folk of their own sort. He was distinctly lonely; he was almost homesick. His mind was perplexed with the object of his voyage, of which he felt the responsibility to a painful degree, so there were few things in his life which he ever enjoyed less than the passage from Brindisi to Alexandria.

At Port Said another half-dozen passengers came on board. Elliott took them all to be English, apparently of the tourist class, travelling around the world on circular tickets. One of them was sent to share Elliott's stateroom, much to his annoyance, but the man proved to be entirely inoffensive, a dull, respectable green-grocer with the strict principles of his London suburb, who was taking his daughter on a long southern sea voyage by medical advice. His sole desire was to return to his early radishes, and he spent almost all his waking hours in sitting dumbly beside his daughter on the after deck, a slight, pale girl of twenty, whose incessant cough sounded as if sea air had been prescribed too late.

122 THE TREASURE TRAIL

It was very hot as the steamer pushed at a snail's pace through the canal. The illimitable reaches of honey-coloured sand seemed to gather up the fierce sun-rays and focus them on the ship. The awnings from stem to stern afforded little relief, and the frilled punkahs sweeping the saloon tables only stirred the heated air. At night the ship threw a portentous glare ahead from the gigantic search-light furnished by the Canal Company, and in the close staterooms it was impossible to sleep. Many of the men walked the deck or dozed in long chairs, and at daybreak there was an undress parade when the imperturbable Lascars turned the hose on a couple of dozen passengers lined against the rail. Then there was a little coolness and it was possible to think of breakfast, before the African sun became again a flaming menace.

It was scarcely better when they reached the Red Sea, where, however, they were able to move at better speed. They had nearly completed this Biblical transit, when a mirage of white-capped mountains floating aërially upside down appeared over the red desert in the south, and all the passengers crowded to the starboard rail to look at it. Elliott had moved to the bow, and was staring idly at the strangely coloured low coast, red and pink and orange, spotted with crags of basalt as black as iron.

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 123

"It would remind a man of Arizona, wouldn't it?" a voice drawled languidly at his elbow.

Elliott wheeled, a little startled. Leaning on the rail beside him was a young man whom he remembered as having come aboard at Port Said with the globe-trotters. He was attired in white flannels and wore a peaked cap, but the voice was unmistakably American, and Elliott felt certain that it had been developed south of the Ohio River.

"I never was in Arizona, but I've seen the same kind of thing in New Mexico," he answered. "How did you know that I had been in the Southwest?"

"There's nothing but the Bad Lands that'll give a man that far-away pucker about the eyes," said the other. "And anybody could pick you out for an American among all these Britishers. We're the only Yankees on board, I reckon. I don't mind calling myself a Yankee here, but I wouldn't at home. I'm from Alabama, sir."

"I thought you were from the South. I'm a Marylander myself," replied Elliott.

"Is that so? I'm mighty glad to hear it. We'll have to moisten that—two Southerners so far from home. My name is Sevier."

Elliott gave his name in return, and permitted himself to be led aft. He looked more closely at

124 THE TREASURE TRAIL

his new acquaintance as they sat down at a table in the stuffy cubby-hole that passes for a smoking-room on the Indian mail-steamers. Sevier was a boyish-looking fellow of perhaps thirty, short, slight, and dark, with a small dark moustache, and a manner that was inexpressibly candid and ingratiating. In time it might come to seem smooth to the point of nausea; at present it appeared off-hand enough, and yet courteous — a manner of which the South alone has preserved the secret — and Elliott in his growing loneliness was delighted to find so agreeable a fellow traveller.

The talk naturally fell upon Southern matters, drifted to the West and South again to Mexico and the Gulf. Sevier seemed to display an unusual knowledge of these localities, though Elliott was unable to check his statements, and he explained that he had been a newspaper correspondent in Central America for a New Orleans daily, the *Globe*.

"The *Globe*?" exclaimed Elliott, recollecting almost forgotten names. "Then you must know Jackson, the night editor. I used to work with him in Denver."

"I've met him. But, you see, I was hardly ever in the office, nor in the city, either. I always worked on the outside."

"The *Globe* had a man in San Salvador last

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 125

year, named Wilcox, I think," Elliott continued, recalling another fact.

"Yes. I reckon he was before me. San Salvador — I sunk a heap of money there!"

"Mining?"

"Yes — or not exactly actually mining. I got a concession for a sulphur mine, and I was going to sell it in New York. It was a mighty good mine, too. There would have been dollars in it, and it cost me five thousand to get it. You know how concessions are got down there, I expect?"

"How did it pan out?"

"It never panned out at all, sir. There was a revolution next month, and the new government annulled everything the old one had done. I hadn't the money to go through the business over again, but I did make something out of the revolution, after all."

"How?"

"Selling rifles to the revolutionists. I didn't think at the time that I was helping to beat my own game. There's money in revolutionizing, too. Down there a man can't keep clear of graft, you know; it's in the air."

In spite of the apologetic tone of the last sentence, Elliott recognized the mental attitude of the adventurer, which was becoming very familiar to him. He had heard a good deal from Henninger

126 THE TREASURE TRAIL

of the business of supplying a revolution with war material, in which Henninger had participated more than once. As often as not, it is done by buying up the officers of a ragged government regiment, and transferring, sometimes not only the rifles and cartridges but also the officers and men as well, to the equally ragged force in opposition.

But if Sevier were an adventurer he was certainly the smoothest specimen of the fraternity that Elliott had yet encountered. And why should such a man be going to India, surely a most unpromising field for the industrious chevalier. As if in answer to the mental inquiry, Sevier announced that he was going to obtain material for a series of magazine articles upon the East, as well as for a number of newspaper letters which he proposed to "syndicate" to half a dozen dailies as special correspondence.

"And I'll have to spend the next six months mixing up with this sort of fellows," he lamented, waving his hand toward a group of Anglo-Indians with seasoned complexions who were deep in "bridge" at a neighbouring table. "I'm too American, or too Southern, or something, to know how to get on with those chaps. I reckon it's the fault of my education. I can't drink their drinks, and I never learned to play whist right, and I've told them my best stories, and they took about as well as the Declaration of Independence. I expect I'll be right

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 127

glad when I get back where I can see a game of baseball and play poker. Do you play poker at all?"

"Not on shipboard. I find it's liable to make me seasick," replied Elliott, a trifle grimly.

The last apparently careless question had, he thought, given him the clue to the secret of his companion's presence on board, though professional gamblers seldom operate upon the Eastern steamship lines.

"I'll give you a bit of advice, too," he added. "Don't start any little game on board, unless it's a very little one, indeed. These boats aren't as sporty as the Atlantic liners."

Sevier stared a moment, and then burst out laughing.

"Oh, I'm no card crook," he said, without showing any offence. "I didn't want to skin you. I'm the worst poker player you ever saw, but I felt somehow like opening jackpots. I'll play penny-ante with you all the evenin', and donate the proceeds to a Seaman's Home, if you like."

Elliott declined this invitation to charity, but he sat chatting for a long time with the young Alabaman. His suspicions were by no means lulled, but, after all, as he reflected, he would be neither Sevier's victim nor his confederate, and, though he did not know it, he was acquiring something of the adventurer's lax notions of morality.

128 THE TREASURE TRAIL

But it was pleasant to talk again on American matters, and to hear the familiar Southern opinions, couched in the familiar Southern drawl. It would, besides, have been difficult to find anywhere a more pleasant fellow traveller than Sevier. He possessed a fund of reminiscence and anecdote of an experience that seemed, in spite of his youth, to have been almost universal, and of a world in which he appeared to have played many parts. Newspaper work was his latest part, and he spoke little of it. Indeed, he was anything but autobiographical, and his tales were almost wholly of the adventures of other men, whose irregularities he viewed with the purely objective and unmoral interest of the man of the world who is at once a cynic and an optimist. Above all, he seemed to have an eye for opportunities of easy money which was more like a down-easter than a man from the Gulf Coast, though he confessed frankly that he was just then in hard luck.

"I've made fortunes," he said. "If I had half the money that I've blown in like a fool, I wouldn't be a penny-a-liner now."

This remark forcibly appealed to Elliott; he had said the same thing many times to himself.

It became a trifle cooler after the steamer passed the dessicated headland of Aden and put out upon the broad Indian Ocean. The weather remained fine, and there was every prospect of a quick pas-

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 129

sage to Bombay. With the lowering of the temperature, the irrepressible British instinct for games reappeared, and there were deck quoits, deck cricket, blindfold races, and a violent sort of tournament in which the combatants aimed to knock one another with pillows from a spar which they sat astride. Under the humanizing influence of these diversions Elliott found his fellow passengers less unapproachable than they had seemed, but he still spent many hours with Sevier, for whom he had conceived a genuine liking. The two Americans were further bound together by a common conviction of the absurdity of violent exertion with the thermometer in the eighties.

On the third day after leaving the Red Sea, Elliott happened to pass down the main stairway as the third officer was putting up the daily chart of the ship's progress. He paused to look at it. The steamer was then, it occurred to him, close to the point where the Italian ship had picked up the mate of the *Clara McClay*.

He took from his pocket a map which he had made, and consulted it. This map showed the hypothetical course of the wrecked gold-ship in a red line, with dotted lines indicating the probable course of the driftings of both the mate's boat and Bennett's raft. As nearly as he could judge, the liner must indeed be at that moment almost upon the spot

130 THE TREASURE TRAIL

where the secret of the position of the wrecked treasure was saved, in the person of the Irishman.

He was still looking at the map when Sevier came quietly down the stairs, paused on the step above him, and glanced over his shoulder. Elliott dropped the map to his side, and then, ashamed of this childish attempt at concealment, raised it again boldly.

"Layin' off a chart of your voyages?" inquired Sevier. "Ever been down there?" putting his finger on the Mozambique Channel.

"No, I never was," answered Elliott, somewhat startled at the question.

"Neither was I. I've been told that there's no more dangerous water in the world. They say the currents run like a mill-race through that channel, in different directions, according to the tides. The coast's covered with wreckage. I thought you might have sailed along that red line you've marked."

"No, I don't know anything about the place," Elliott denied again, putting the map in his pocket.

"Thinking of going there?"

"Not at present."

"I wish I could find out something definite about the islands in that channel. Nobody knows anything about them at all except the Arab coast pirates, and they keep all the pickings there are to themselves."

THE MAN FROM ALABAMA 131

"You'll find better pickings in India, you vulture," cried Elliott, with an easy laugh.

He was far from feeling easy, however, and for a time he was sharply suspicious of the Alabaman. Yet it was highly improbable that any one else knew the secret of the *Clara McClay's* cargo and of her end; and it was practically impossible that any one knew more of the wreck than he did himself. Certainly Sevier could have no more definite information, or he would be sailing to the Madagascar coast instead of to India. Elliott persuaded himself that the young Alabaman's questions had been prompted by mere curiosity, and that their startling appositeness was the result of coincidence. Still, the incident revived his sense of the need for haste, and renewed his eagerness to discover the traces of Burke, the brutal mate, the one man living who knew the whole secret of the drowned millions.

Rapidly as the good ship rolled off the knots, her slowness irritated him. He counted the hours, almost the minutes, and it was hard to contain his impatience till they came at last in sight of the low, green-brown Indian shore.

Bombay came in sight on the port bow that evening, a strange sky-line of domes and squares. Heat lightning flickered low on the landward horizon, casting the city into sharp silhouette against the sky, and from some festival ashore the clash and

132 THE TREASURE TRAIL

boom of cymbals and the terrific blare of conches rolled softened across the water.

For hours after the steamer had anchored, the English civil and military servants stayed on deck to look at the field of their coming labours, and all night long the ship resounded with the clacking roar of the derricks clearing the baggage hold.

"Poor devils!" murmured Sevier, looking at the English clustered along the rail. "I wonder how many of the passengers on this boat will ever see England again — or America, either."

And Elliott, thinking of his perilous mission, wondered also.

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE TRAIL

ELLIOTT had expected to find an Oriental city; he had looked for a sort of maze of black alleys, ivory lattices, temples, minarets, and a medley of splendour and squalor; but in his surprise at the reality he said that Bombay was almost like an American city. There was squalor and splendour enough, but they were not as he had imagined them; and at the first sight of the wide, straight, busy streets he felt a great relief, realizing that his detective work would not have to be pursued under such "Arabian Night" conditions as he had anticipated.

At the landing-stage he surrendered himself to a white-robed and barefoot native runner, who claimed to represent Ward's Anglo-Indian Hotel, and this functionary at once bundled him into a ricksha, which started off at a trot. So unfamiliar a mode of locomotion revived some of Elliott's primal expectations of the East, and the crowds that filled the street from house-front to house-front helped to strengthen them. The populace, as Elliott

134 THE TREASURE TRAIL

observed with surprise, were nearly as black as the negroes at home, clad in every variety and colour of costume, brilliant as a garden of tulips, and through the dense mass his ricksha man forced a passage by screaming unintelligible abuse at the top of his voice. Occasionally a black victoria clove its slow way past him, bearing a white-clad Englishman, who gazed unseeingly over the swarming mass; and Elliott for the first time breathed the smell of the East, that compound of heat and dust and rancid butter and perspiring humanity that somehow strangely suggests the yellow marigold flowers that hang in limp clusters in the market-places of all Bengal.

At the hotel, a gigantic and imposing structure, he was received by a Eurasian in a frock coat and no shoes, who assigned him to a vast bedroom, cool and darkened and almost large enough to play tennis in. Elliott examined the unfamiliar appurtenances with some curiosity, and then took a delicious dip in the bathroom that opened from his chamber. He then changed his clothes and went down-stairs, determined to lose no time in visiting the United States Consulate.

The mate of the *Clara McClay*, as the only surviving officer, was required to report the circumstances of the loss of his ship to the American consul; and self-interest, as much as law, should equally

have impelled him to do so. For by reporting the foundering of the steamer in deep water he would clear himself of responsibility, and at the same time close the case and check any possible investigation into the whereabouts of the wreck.

But Elliott learned at once that the white man in India is not supposed to exert himself. The manager of the house, to whom he applied for information, placed him in a long cane chair while a ricksha was being called, and then installed him in the baby-carriage conveyance, giving elaborate instructions in the vernacular to the native motor. And again the vivid panorama of the streets unrolled before Elliott's eyes under the blinding sun-blaze, — the closely packed crowd of white head-dresses, the nude torsos, bronze and black, the gorgeous silks, and violent-hued cottons rolling slowly over the earthen pavement that was packed hard by millions of bare feet.

The gridiron shield with the eagle looked homelike to Elliott when he set eyes on it, but he found the official representative of the United States to be a brass-coloured Eurasian, who seemed to have some recollection of the *Clara McClay* or her mate, but was either unable or unwilling to impart any information. He was the consular secretary; the consul was out at the moment, but he returned just as Elliot was turning away in disappointment. He

136 THE TREASURE TRAIL

was a rubicund gentleman of middle age, from Ohio, as Elliott presently learned, and proud of the fact. He wore a broad straw hat of American design — Heaven knows how he had procured it in that land — and, to Elliott's unbounded amazement, he was accompanied by his own steamer acquaintance, the *Alabaman Sevier*.

Elliott nodded to Sevier, trying to conceal his consternation, and was for going away immediately, but the secretary was, after all, only too anxious to give assistance.

"Be pleased to wait a moment, sir. This is the consul. Mr. Guiger, this gentleman is asking if we know anything of the position of the mate of the wrecked American steamer, called the *Clara McClay*."

"His position? By Jupiter, I wish I knew it!" ejaculated the consul, mopping his face, but showing a more than physical warmth. "This other gentleman here has just been asking me the same thing, and I've had a dozen wires from the owners in Philadelphia."

Elliott was thunderstruck at this revelation of Sevier's interest in the matter, but it was too late to draw back.

"I was asked to make inquiries by relatives of one of the crew," he said, mendaciously. "Has the mate showed up here at all?"

"Showed up? Of course he did. He had to, by Jupiter! But it was his business to keep in touch with me till the case was gone into and settled. He gave me an address on Malabar Hill, — too swell a locality for a sailorman, thinks I, — and, sure enough, when I sent there for him, they had never heard of him. I've not set eyes on him since. He'll lose his ticket, that's all."

"What sort of a report did he make?"

"Why, nothing. Said the ship was rotten, and her cargo shifted in a gale and some of her rivets must have drawn, and she foundered. Every one went down but himself, — all drunk, I suppose. But he didn't even make a sworn statement. Said he'd come back next day, and I was in a hurry myself, and I let him go, like a fool."

"You don't know whether he's still in the city?"

"I don't know anything. I've set the police to look for him, but these black-and-tan cops don't amount to anything. He may be half-way to Australia by this time. Like as not he is."

"Where did he say his ship foundered?" asked Sevier, speaking for the first time.

"Somewhere in the Mozambique Channel, in deep water. He didn't know exactly. Along about latitude twelve, south, he said. Went down like a lump of lead."

138 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Elliott thought of her weighty cargo, and, glancing up, he met Sevier's eye fixed keenly on him.

"Well, if the man can't be found, I suppose that's the end of it," he said, carelessly, and turned away again.

"Sorry I can't help you, gentlemen," responded the consul. "If I get any news, I'll let you know. You don't happen to have brought out any American newspapers, do you — Chicago ones, for choice?"

Elliott was devoid of these luxuries, and Sevier followed him out to the street, where the ricksha was still waiting.

"Is that your perambulator?" inquired the Alabaman. "Let's walk a little. The streets aren't so crowded here."

"It's undignified for a white man to walk in this country, but I'll make my ricksha man follow me," said Elliott. "Besides, I couldn't find my way back to the hotel without him."

They walked for several minutes in silence down the side of the street that was shaded by tall buildings of European architecture.

"Were you ever at a New Orleans Mardi Gras? Hanged if this town doesn't remind me of it!" Sevier suddenly broke silence. "By the way, I didn't know that you were interested in the *Clara McClay*."

"I'm not," said Elliott, on the defensive. "I was simply making inquiries on behalf of other people, to get some details about her loss. You seem to have more interest than that in her yourself."

"Oh, my interest is a purely business one," replied Sevier, lightly. "I know her owners pretty well, and they wired me from Philadelphia to find out something about her. I found the cablegram waiting for me when I got here. Funny thing that the mate should disappear that way. Something crooked, eh?"

"Possibly. Queer things happen on the high seas. It looks as if he were afraid of something."

"Or after something. I've heard of ships being run ashore for insurance."

"But the *Clara McClay* didn't run ashore," Elliott reminded him. "She foundered in deep water, you know."

"Oh, yes, she foundered in deep water," drawled Sevier. "Have you got the spot marked on your map?"

This attack was so sudden and so unexpected that Elliott floundered.

"That map you have in your pocket, with her course marked in red," Sevier pursued, relentlessly.

"That map you saw on the steamer? That wasn't a chart of the *Clara McClay's* course. Or,

at least," Elliott went on, recovering his wind, "I don't suppose it is, accurately. I drew it to see if I could make out where she must have sunk, by a sort of dead reckoning. You see, I felt a certain interest in her on account of the inquiries I was commissioned to make. Nobody knows exactly what her course was."

"Nobody but the mate, and he's skipped the country. Well, I hope you find him, for the sake of the bereaved kinfolk."

He turned a humourous and incredulous glance at Elliott, and its invitation to frankness was unmistakable. Had Elliott been alone in the affair he might have responded, and taken his companion as a partner. But he had not the right to do that; there were men enough to share the plunder already; but he was possessed with curiosity to learn what Sevier knew, and, above all, what he wanted. Sevier had learned nothing from Bennett; he could have learned nothing from the mate, else he would not be in pursuit of him. How then could he know what cargo the *Clara McClay* had carried?

They walked a little further, talking of the features of interest like a pair of Cook's tourists, while the ricksha man marched stolidly behind.

"Queer that Burke didn't know where she went down!" said Sevier, as if to himself.

"Who's Burke?" asked Elliott, on the alert this time.

"The mate of the *Clara McClay*. Didn't you know his name? I got it from the owners. They're wild about him; swear they'll have his certificate taken from him. It seems he hasn't reported a word to them, and all they know is a newspaper item saying that he was picked up from the wreck."

"Was all that in your cablegram?" demanded Elliott, with malice.

"They told me that in Philadelphia, before I left," Sevier replied, imperturbably.

This was just possible, but, after a rapid mental calculation of dates, Elliott decided that it was unlikely. Besides, why should the owners have cabled, if they had seen their messenger just before he sailed? But he had already arrived at the conviction that Sevier's explanation of his interest in the treasure-ship was as fictitious as his own.

"Isn't it likely," he said, easily, "that the mate was drunk and navigated her out of her course, and ran her ashore? He knows that he's responsible for her loss, and he's afraid to face a court of inquiry."

"He'll sure lose his certificate anyway, if he doesn't show up. Besides, he didn't run her ashore. She went down in deep water."

142 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Sure enough, she went down in deep water," Elliott acquiesced. A strong sense of the futility of this fencing stole over him, and he turned abruptly and beckoned to his ricksha.

"It's too hot to walk. I'm going back to my hotel — the Anglo-Indian. Come around and look me up. Are you going to search for your lost mate?"

"Oh, dear, no! I'm not paid for doing that. Besides, I'm going up the country in a day or so to get stuff for my articles."

He watched Elliott into his ricksha, and walked off, Elliott wondered vainly where.

He wondered also whether he ought not to keep close to this smooth-spoken pseudo-journalist, who, he felt sure, was also on the track of the treasure-ship. But this would hamper him fatally in his quest for the elusive mate Burke, and this quest was to be Elliott's next affair.

But he had next to no idea just where or how he would look. He was an inlander; he knew little of the ways of seafaring men ashore, and nothing at all of this particular city. He plunged boldly into the search, however, and, as a preliminary, he spent a day in roaming about the waterfront of Mazagon Bay, entering into conversation with such white seamen as he came across. But he was acutely conscious that he made a bungle

of this. These men were too far outside his experience for him to enter into easy relations with them. His immaculate white flannels were also against him; he received either too much deference or too little, and he suspected that he was taken for a detective or a customs officer. He decided that he would have to assume a less respectable appearance.

But every one he met professed total ignorance of the *Clara McClay* and her mate. Most of the men were transient; they had been in Bombay for only a few days or weeks, and the arrival of a single man, even the survivor of a wreck, is too slight an episode to leave any mark upon such a port as Bombay, where the shipping of a whole world is gathered. But a vessel is a different thing, and Elliott learned — it was the whole result of his day's work — that the Italian steamer *Andrea Sforza*, which had picked up Burke's boat, had sailed a month ago for Cape Town.

Had Burke gone with her? No one knew. Elliott thought it most probable; and in that case the rich grave of the gold-ship must be rifled already. A feeling of sick failure spread through Elliott's system as he realized that the whole quest might have been in vain, even before they left America. But he cabled to Henninger at Zanzibar:

144 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Steamer *Andrea Sforzia* sailed Cape Town about April 10th, likely with Burke."

Still it might be that the mate had not sailed with the Italian steamer, after all, and, while awaiting a reply from Zanzibar, Elliott resumed his detective work. It was good to pass the anxious time, if it led to no other result. He hired a room in a cheap sailors' hotel in Mazagon, where he went every morning to change his white clothes for a dirty, bluish dungarce slop-suit, which he bought at a low clothing store, and, thus suitably attired, he was able to pursue his explorations among the tortuous ways of the old Portuguese settlement and attract no attention so long as he kept his mouth shut. These wanderings he often carried far into the night, returning finally to his dirty room to resume the garb of respectability.

He saw many strange things in these explorations among the groggeries, dives, and sailors' boarding-houses, where the seamen of every maritime race on earth herded together in their stifling quarter. He sat in earthen-floored drinking-shops, where Lascars, Norse, Yankees, Englishmen, and Italians gulped down poisonous native liquors like water, and quarrelled in a babel of tongues; he leaned over fan-tan tables in huge, filthy rooms that had been the palaces of merchant princes; and nightly he saw the tired dancing-girls from the Hills

posture obscenely before an audience of white, yellow, and brown sea scum, ferociously drunk or stupid with opium. More than once he saw knives drawn and used, and the blood spurt dark in the candle-light; and once he had to run for it to avoid being gathered in by the police along with his companions. But nowhere could he hear anything of what he sought, and he could find no one who would admit having seen the mate of the *Clara McClay*.

He had received no reply from Henniger, and this, perhaps, illogically reassured him. After a week he had ceased to expect any, but by this time he had well ceased to believe that Burke was still in Bombay. If he were there, Elliott did not believe that he could be found, and he regretted anew that he had not obtained a detailed description of the man from Bennett. He visited the American consul again, but that official had no further news, and was able to describe the mate only as "a big fellow, with a big beard turning gray," which was indefinite enough.

After all, Elliott reflected, the man would be likely to change his name and to keep apart from other seamen. Surely, if he had been going to fit out a wrecking expedition, he would have done it long since, but such an enterprise would certainly have left memories upon the water-front. Elliott

146 THE TREASURE TRAIL

could not learn that anything of the sort had been done. Possibly Burke had gone elsewhere to launch his expedition; very likely he had no money, and had gone elsewhere to obtain it.

Elliott grew very weary with turning over all these possibilities, and almost disheartened, but he persisted in his perambulations about the sailor quarter. He was beginning to feel the deadly lassitude which stealthily grows upon the unacclimated white man in the tropics, and he would probably have given up the quest in another week, but for a lucky chance.

The crush of the crowd had elbowed him into a corner beside a tiny second-hand clothes-stall near the landing-place of the coasting steamers, and he gazed idly at the foul-looking seamen's clothing — caps, oilskins, sea boots, cotton trousers — that almost filled the recess in the wall that served for a shop. In the centre lounged the shopman, apparently half Eurasian and half English Jew, who looked as if he clothed himself from his own stock in trade.

As Elliott was trying to disengage himself from the crowd, he knocked down a suit of oilskins, and stooped to pick it up. It was an excellent specimen, though considerably worn. The heavy sou'wester had black lettering on the

had been done in India ink, and read "J. Burke, S. S. *Clara McClay*."

Elliott stared at the initials, dazzled by his good luck. They must be the oilskins of the missing mate, who had sold them there. Who else could have brought clothing from the wreck to Bombay? The shopman, scenting trade, had crept forward, and was sidling and fawning at Elliott's shoulder.

"Want nice oilskins, Sahib? Ver' scheap. You shall haf dem for ten rupee."

"I'll give you five," said Elliott, carelessly, hanging up the cap.

"Fif rupee? Blood of Buddha! I pay eight. s'help me Gawd!"

"Look here," said Elliott. "I don't want the oilskins, but I think they used to belong to a friend of mine, and I'll give you eight rupees if you'll tell me where you got them."

The merchant wrinkled his brows, undoubtedly pondering whether he was in danger of compromising any thief of his acquaintance.

"I remember," he presently announced. "You gif me ten rupee?"

"Ten it is."

"I buy dem more than two weeks ago from your friend's kitmatgar, Hurris Chunder."

Elliott's heart sank again. "My friend's a sailor-man, and wouldn't have a servani."

148 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Hurris Chunder say his master gif dem to him," insisted the Jew.

"Can you find Hurris Chunder?"

"Maybe," with an avid grin.

"Here's your ten rupees," said Elliott. "I'll give you ten more if you'll manage to have Hurris Chunder here to-night, and he shall have another ten for telling me what he knows. Does it go?"

"Yes," responded the trader, with lightning comprehension of Western slang. "The Sahib will find Hurris Chunder here to-night. At ten o'clock."

Elliott had already learned the indefinite notions of the East regarding time, and he did not care to show the impatience he felt, so he did not arrive at his appointment till nearly eleven o'clock. The yellow Jew led him to the rear of the tiny shop and introduced him through an unsuspected door into a small chamber littered with rags, old clothes, rubbish of copper and brass, and dirty-looking apparatus. It was here that the merchant ate and slept, and in the middle of the floor a white-clad figure was squatting, smoking a brass pipe.

"This is Hurris Chunder, Sahib," said the Jew, eagerly.

The native, a golden-complexioned young man, with a somewhat sleepy Buddha-like face, put down his pipe, and bowed without getting up.

"Very good," said Elliott. "Here's your ten

rupees, Israel. Now, get out. I want to have a little private talk with our friend."

The half-caste scut into the outer shop and closed the door.

"Now, then, Hurris, tell me the truth. Where did you steal those oilskins?"

Hurris Chunder made a deprecating gesture. "May the Presence pardon me," he said, in soft and excellent English. "I did not steal them. My master, Baker Sahib, gave them to me."

"Baker Sahib, indeed!" Elliott murmured. "Where is your master? What did he look like?"

"He was a tall, lean, strong sahib, and when he first came he had a great gray beard. He lived for many days at the Planters' Hotel, and I was unworthily his kitmatgar."

This was another surprise, for the Planters' was an excellent, quiet, and rather high-priced hotel, and the mate was presumably short of funds.

"He had money, then?"

"He had much money, English money. He was a very generous Sahib."

"Well, you'll find me a generous Sahib, too, if you act on the level. Here's your ten rupees. Baker Sahib is at the Planters', then?"

"No, Sahib, he went away. He gave me the oilskins when he went. He sailed on a ship, a great black steamer. He went to England."

150 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"To England? Are you sure it wasn't Africa?"

"Yes, Sahib, to Africa."

"What port was she bound for?"

"Sahib, before God, I do not know. I think London."

"London? You said Africa. Wasn't it America?"

"The Sahib is right."

"Or Australia?"

"If the Sahib pleases, it is so," was the submissive response.

"You old fraud!" said Elliott. "You don't know where he went. Are you sure he went away at all?"

"Yes, Sahib. He cut off his great beard, and I took his luggage to the ship for him, — a great black steamer, full of English. I do not know the name of the ship."

"Cut off his beard, eh? And you don't know what ship it was, or where she went? Well, never mind, I can find that out myself. Your knowledge is distinctly limited, Hurris, but you're a good boy, and I believe you've given me the key to the situation. It's worth another rupee or two. Good-bye."

He tossed the native three more rupees, and went to change his clothes, bursting with excited impatience. To-morrow he would know the mate's destination.

As early as possible the next morning, he sought the Planters' Hotel, and found that Baker Sahib had indeed been there since the 18th of March. This was the day after the arrival of the *Andrea Strozzi* at Bombay, and the coincidence of the dates was corroborative evidence. He had left on the 27th of March, and his destination was unknown at the hotel.

An examination of the shipping-lists, however, showed that on March 27th three passenger steamers had sailed from Bombay, — the *Punjaub*, for London; the *Imperadora*, for Southampton, and the *Prince of Burmah* for Hongkong. Elliott hastened to the city passenger offices of these lines, and begged permission to inspect the passenger-lists of their ships sailing on that day. The sheets of the *Punjaub* and of the *Imperadora* proved devoid of interest, but half-way down the list of the *Prince of Burmah's* saloon passengers he came upon the name of Henry Baker. He was booked through to Hongkong.

The amazing improbability of this almost staggered Elliott. If the mate knew the secret of the treasure, why should he fly thus to the very antipodes; and if he knew no guilty secrets, why should he have secreted himself in Bombay, and cut off his beard for purposes of disguise?

Were Baker and Burke identical, after all? But

152 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the American consul's brief description of the man tallied with that of Hurris Chunder, and Baker had arrived at the Planters' Hotel the day after Burke had arrived in Bombay. Baker had brought with him oilskins from the wrecked ship, from which he alone had been picked up at that time.

It must be the mate, Elliott thought. In any case, Baker must know things of importance to the gold hunters, and Elliott cabled again to Zanzibar:

"Mate sailed Hongkong. Am following."

Three days later he sailed for Hongkong himself. Up to the very moment of clearing port he was tormented with apprehensions that Sevier would appear on board. But, whatever were the researches of the Alabaman, they were evidently being conducted in a different quarter, and the weight gradually lifted from Elliott's mind as the steamer ploughed slowly down the bay, past the white moored monitors and the little rocky islets of the peninsula. The treasure hunt had turned out a man hunt, but he hoped that he was upon the last stage of the long stern chase.

CHAPTER X.

A LOST CLUE

VICTORIA CITY on Hongkong Island was almost invisible in hot mist and rain as the steamer crawled up the roads and anchored off the sea-wall. The gray harbour water appeared to steam, slopping sluggishly against her iron sides, and the rain steamed as it fell, so that the heavy air was a sort of stew of wet and heat and strange smells of the sea and land. The Lascar and coolie deck-hands were hurrying out the side-ladder, the water streaming from their faces and their coarse black hair; but, above the rattle and bustle of disembarkation, Elliott was aware of the movement of a mighty life clustered invisibly around him. The hum and roar of an immense city pierced the fog to landward; on the other side he was conscious of the presence of innumerable shipping. The noises came hollowly through the hot air, echoed from the sides of giant vessels; he caught hazy glimpses of towering forests of yards, and of wet, black funnels. The air was acrid with the smoke of coal, and the water

154 THE TREASURE TRAIL

splashed incessantly upon the sea-wall from the swift passage of throbbing steam launches. Away in the mist there was a rapid fusilade of fire-crackers, and somewhere, apparently from the clouds above the city, a gun was fired, reverberating through the mist. A ship's bell was struck near by, and, before the strokes had ceased, it was taken up by another vessel, and another, and the sound spread through the haze, near and far, tinkling in every key:

"Ting, ting; ting, ting; ting!" It was half-past five o'clock in the afternoon.

The rain slackened, and a fresh breeze split the mist. To landward Elliott beheld a wet, white city climbing irregularly up the sides of a long serrated mountain. The water-front along the sea-wall swarmed with traffic, with rickshaws, sedan-chairs, carts, trucks, gay umbrellas, coolies, Lascars, Chinese, Indians, Japanese. The port was crowded with shipping, from war-steamers to high-sterned junks, as motley as the throng ashore, and it was shot through incessantly with darting tugs and launches, so that in its activity it reminded him more of New York bay than of any other roadstead he had ever seen.

During the voyage from Bombay he had perforce picked up a smattering of that queer "pidgin-English" so apparently loose and so really organized

a language, and when he stepped upon the Praya he beckoned authoritatively to a passing palanquin.

"Boy! You savvy number one good hotel?"

"Yes, master. Gleast Eastel' Hotel b'long number one good."

"Gleast Eastern Hotel, then — chop-chop." Elliott acquiesced, getting into the chair, and the coolies set off as he had directed, chop-chop, that is, with speed. They scurried across the Praya, up a narrow cross street, and came out upon Queen's Road. They passed the Club and the post-office and finally set him down at the hotel, which, in spite of its great size and elaborate cooling devices, he found intolerably hot and damp. It rained all that evening, till his clothing hung limply upon him even in the billiard-room of the hotel, and when he went to his chamber he found the sheets apparently sodden, and damp stood shining on the walls. Even in the steamy passage through the Malay Archipelago Elliott had spent no such uncomfortable night as that first one in Victoria at the commencement of the rainy season.

A torrential rain was pouring down when he awoke, after having spent most of the night in listening to the scampering of the cockroaches about his room. It was a hot rain, and there was no morning freshness in the air. The room was as damp as if the roof had been leaking, but he began

156 THE TREASURE TRAIL

to realize that this was to be expected and endured in Victoria for the next three months, and, shuddering damply, he resolved that he would hunt down his man within a week, if "Baker" were still upon the island.

By the time he had finished a very English breakfast, for which he had no appetite, the rain had ceased, leaving the air even hotter than before. The sun shone dimly from a watery sky. Elliott felt oppressed with an aching languor, but he was deeply anxious to finish his work and get away, so he went out upon the hot streets.

This time he would not repeat the mistakes of Bombay, and he wasted no time in adventures about the harbour. He called a sedan-chair and, having ascertained the names of the leading hotels of the city, he proceeded to investigate them one by one.

This search resulted in nothing but disappointment. There was no record of the man he sought at any hotel, neither at the expensive ones nor at the second and third class houses to which he presently descended. The mate might indeed have changed his name again on landing, though Elliott could think of no reason why he should do so. At the East India Navigation Company's offices he ascertained that "Baker" had indeed landed at Victoria from the *Prince of Burmah*, but nothing was known of his present whereabouts.

Finally Elliott called upon the American consul, who could give him no help. He had never heard of the *Clara McClay* or her mate, but he turned out to be a Marylander, and he took Elliott to dinner with him, and made him free of the magnificent Hongkong Club, which is the envy of all the foreign settlements on the Eastern seas.

Under the sweeping punkahs in the vast, dusky rooms of the Club a temperature was maintained more approaching to coolness than Elliott had yet found in Victoria, and he lounged there for most of the evening, observing that a great part of the male white population of the city seemed to do likewise. It had come on to rain again, and the shuffle of bare feet in the streets mingled with the dismal swish of the downpour. He had been in Victoria for twenty-four hours, but he found himself bitterly weary already and oppressed with a certainty of failure.

Failure was indeed his lot during the next two weeks, though by an examination of the shipping-lists he assured himself that Baker had not sailed from Hongkong in the last two months, at least, not by any of the regular passenger steamers. It was out of all probability that he should have gone into the interior of China, and beyond possibility that he should have organized his wrecking expedition at so distant a port. Yet it was almost equally

158 THE TREASURE TRAIL

beyond the limits of likelihood that he should have come to Hongkong at all; and it was so beyond the bounds of sanity that he should voluntarily stay there during the rains that Elliott was forced to recognize that reason afforded no clue to the man's movements.

To search for a stray straw in a haystack is trying to the temper, especially when the search must be conducted under the conditions of a vapour bath. But Elliott sweltered and toiled with a determination that certainly deserved more success than he attained. He acquired much knowledge that was new to him in that fortnight. He learned the names and flavours of many strange and cooling drinks; he learned to call a chair or a rickshaw when he had to go twenty yards; to hang his clothes in an airtight safe overnight to save them from the cockroaches; to scrape the nocturnal accumulation of mould from his shoes in the morning, and to look inside them for centipedes before he put them on. He learned to keep matches and writing-paper in glass jars, to forget that there was such a thing as stiff linen, and to call it a dry day if the rain occasionally slackened. But he learned nothing of what he was most anxious to discover. He could find no trace of either Baker or Burke at the hotels, at the consulates, at the Club, or along the water-

front, and no man in Victoria admitted to having ever heard of the *Clara McClay*.

From time to time he went up to the Peak, behind the city, to gain refreshment in that social and physical altitude. A house there cost fifty guineas a month, but every one had it who pretended to comfort or distinction. It was damp even on the Peak, but it was cool; Hongkong Bay and Victoria lay almost perpendicularly below, veiled by a steamy haze, but on the summit fresh breezes played among the China pines, and Elliott always took the tram-car down the zigzag road again with fresh courage for an adventure that was daily growing more intolerably unadventurous.

The same desire for coolness at any cost led him to take the coasting-boat for Macao on the second Saturday of his stay. He had heard much already of the dead Portuguese colony, the Monte Carlo of the China coast, maintaining its wretched life by the lottery, the fan-tan houses, and the perpetual issue of new series of postage stamps for the beguilement of collectors. But Macao is cooler than Hongkong, and those who cannot afford to live on the Peak find it a convenient place for the weekend, much to the benefit of the gaming-tables.

This being a Saturday, the boat was crowded with Victoria business men, who looked forward to a relief from the heat and the strain of the week in

160 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the groves and the fan-tan saloons of Macao. The relief began almost as soon as the roadstead was cleared, and a fresher breeze blew from a clearer sky, a cool east wind that came from green Japan. Elliott inhaled it with delight; it was almost as good as the Peak.

The verdant crescent of Macao Bay came in sight after a couple of hours' steaming. At either tip of the curve stood a tiny and dilapidated block-house flying the Portuguese banner, and between them, along the water's edge, ran a magnificent boulevard shaded by stately banyan-trees. The whole town appeared embowered in foliage; the white houses glimmered from among green boughs, and behind the town rose deeply wooded hills. Scarcely an idler sauntered on the Praya; a couple of junks slept at the decaying wharves, and deep silence brooded over the whole shore.

"Beautiful!" ejaculated Elliott, unconsciously, overjoyed at the sight of a place that looked as if it knew neither business nor rain nor heat.

"Beautiful enough — but dead and accursed," replied a man who had been reading in a deck-chair beside him.

"It looks dead, I must say," Elliott admitted, glancing again at the deserted wharves.

The other man stood up, slipping a magazine into his pocket. He was gray-haired, tall, and very

thin, with a face of reposeful benignity. The magazine, Elliott observed, was the *Religious Outlook*, of San Francisco.

"An American missionary," he thought; and his heart warmed at the sight of a fellow countryman.

"I suppose it is pretty bad," he said, aloud. "The more reason for men of your cloth to come over here."

The old man looked puzzled for a moment, and then gently shook his head with a smile.

"I'm not a missionary, as you seem to think. At least, I ain't any more of a missionary than I reckon every man ought to be who tries to live as he should. I'm just a tired-out Hongkong book-keeper."

"You're an American, anyway."

"You are too, ain't you?"

"Certainly I am," Elliott proclaimed. "And you —"

The little steamer rammed the wharf with a thump that set everything jingling on board. The gangplank was run out; the old man dived into the cabin in evident search for something or some one, and Elliott lost sight of him, and went ashore.

Macao slumbered in profound serenity. As soon as the excursionists had scattered, the Praya Grande was deserted. The great white houses seemed

162 THE TREASURE TRAIL

asleep or dead behind their close green shutters and wrought iron lattices that reminded Elliott of the Mexican southwest. But the air was clear and fresh, and it was possible to walk about without being drenched with perspiration. Elliott strolled, lounged on the benches in the deserted park, visited the monument to Camoens above the bay, and finally ate a supper at the only decent hotel in the place, and enjoyed it thoroughly because it contained neither English nor Chinese dishes.

In the evening there was a little more animation. There were strollers about the streets like himself; the band played in the park, and through the iron-barred windows he caught occasional mysterious glimpses of dark and seductive eyes under shadowy lashes. As he sauntered past the blank front of a great stone house that in the days of Macao's greatness had possibly been the home of a prince, he was stopped by a silk-clad coolie who lounged beside the wide, arched entrance.

"Chin-chin master. You wantchee makee one piecey fan-tan pidgin?"

Elliott had no idea of playing, but he had no objection to watching a little "fan-tan pidgin," and he allowed the Celestial "capper" to introduce him through the iron gate that barred the archway. The arch was as long as a tunnel, lead-

ing to the square *patio* at the heart of the house, and here the scene was sufficiently curious.

Here the fan-tan tables were set, completely hidden from Elliott's view by the packed mass of men that stood above them. Over each table burned a ring of gas-jets; far above them the stars shone clear in the blue sky beyond the roofless court. Round the *patio* ran a wide balcony, dimly lighted, where men were drinking at little tables or leaning over to look down at the game, and there was a scurrying to and fro of deft, white-robed Chinese waiters. Round the games there was absolute silence, except for the click of the counters, the rattle of the coin, and the impassive voice of the dealer as he announced, "Number one side!"

Elliott pushed into the nearest group till he could see the table. Opposite to him sat the dealer, a yellow Portuguese half-caste, his hands full of small gilded counters; and beside him the croupier leaned over shallow boxes of gold, silver, and bills. The centre of the table was covered with a large square piece of sheet lead, with each side numbered, and coins scattered about the sides and corners. The dealer filled both his slim, dirty hands with the gilded counters and counted them out in little piles of four each. There were two counters left over.

"Number two side!" he announced, wearily.

Those who had staked their money upon the

164 THE TREASURE TRAIL

second side of the leaden square were at once paid three times their stake by the croupier; those who had placed their bets at the corner of the first and second, or the second and third were paid even money. The dealer again plunged his hands into the great heap of shining counters.

Round the table men of all conditions, nationalities, and colours hung upon the dropping of the bits of gilded metal. There were coolies staking their small silver coins, Hongkong merchants, white and Chinese, putting down sovereigns and Bank of England notes, half a dozen English men-of-war's men gambling away their pay, and a few tourists playing nothing at all. There were Japanese there, Sikhs from Hongkong, and a couple of wild Malays. The desertion of the streets was explained. The whole moribund life of the colony throbbed in these fierce ulcers.

Elliott had seen the game often enough already to understand it, and he was determined not to play. The money Henninger had given him was going fast enough as it was. He watched the game, however, with considerable interest, and began to predict the numbers mentally. There was a run on the even numbers. Four came up three times in succession, then two, then four again, then three, one, and again back to the even numbers. Elliott watched the handful of gilded discs that the dealer

was counting out, and long before the end was reached he felt certain of what the remainder would be, and usually he was right. If he had only played his predictions, he calculated that he would then have won three or four hundred dollars. He might as well have had it as not; he remembered the wonderful winning at roulette in Nashville, and the money in his pocket almost stirred of itself. He had a couple of sovereigns in his hand before he knew how they came there, but it was too late to play them on that deal.

He waited, therefore, and elbowed himself through the crowd to be nearer the table. This change in position brought him close behind the shoulder of a tall man with gray hair, who was leaning anxiously across the table as the gilded counters slipped through the dealer's delicate fingers. Elliott glanced abstractedly aside at the man's face, and the shock of surprise made him forget the game.

It was certainly his clerical-looking friend of the steamer, though his face no longer wore its expression of sweetness and repose. He was desperately intent on the game, that was evident. As the counters were cast out his lips moved counting "one, two, three, four!" He had his hand full of gold coins, and three sovereigns lay before him on number two.

166 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Number four side!" the dealer proclaimed.

The old man groaned audibly. The croupier swept in the losing stakes and paid out the winning ones with incredible celerity. There was a pause, while fresh bets were made. The old man looked from one side of the square to another with agonized perplexity, fingering his coin. Finally he put down three sovereigns on the fourth side, and almost immediately changed his mind and shoved them across to the third.

Elliott did not play. The surprise of this encounter had brought him to himself, and he watched the man, wondering. It was plain that the old man was no gambler; he did not even make a pretence at assuming the imperturbable air of the sporting man. He was childishly agitated; he looked as if he might cry if his bad luck continued. Elliott called him a fool, and yet he was sorry for him.

"Joss-pidgin man," he heard a coolie whisper to another, indicating the inexperienced player with contempt.

Number four side won, and the old man lost again upon the next deal. His handful of gold was diminishing, but he staked six sovereigns upon the second side of the square. "Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord, help me!" Elliott caught the murmur from his moving lips. Elliott was disgusted, sick and

sorry at the pitiful sight, and yet it was none of his business. The man turned once and looked him full in the face with absent eyes that saw nothing, faded blue eyes that were full of weak tears.

"Number one side!" called the dealer, and the six sovereigns were raked in by the bank. The old man now had six coins left, and he staked three of them without hesitation on the second side as before. Squeezed against his side, Elliott could feel his thin old arms trembling with painful excitement.

"Number one side!"

A kind of explosive sob burst from the player's lips. He followed his money with hungry eyes as it was gathered up, and then his glance wandered about the circle of white and brown faces with a pitiful appeal. His eye met Elliott's; it was full of a hurt, bewildered disappointment. The old man put out his hand to stake his last pieces.

Elliott grasped his arm, on a sudden impulse.

"Don't play any more," he said, in a low tone.

"You've got no luck to-night."

The player looked blankly at him, and tried to pull away his arm.

"Stop it, I say," reiterated Elliott. "You'd better come away with me. You don't know anything about this game."

"Who are you? I don't know you. You're

168 THE TREASURE TRAIL

trying to rob me, but I'll get my money back in spite of you."

"You old fool, I'm the best friend you've got in this house. You come right along with me," said Elliott, energetically, trying to drag the gambler away from the table.

He resisted with a sort of limp determination, but Elliott hauled him through the circle of players that immediately closed up behind them. No one troubled to look around; the game went on, and the dealer announced, "Number four side!"

"Now put your money in your pocket. We'll go out," Elliott ordered, wondering at himself for taking so much trouble. For aught he knew, the man might have been able to afford a loss of thousands. The unlucky player fumbled tremulously with his sovereigns, and Elliott was finally obliged to tuck them away for him.

The guard at the gate let them out, and Elliott resolved to take precautions against his protégé's returning to the game.

"You see this Salib?" he said to the coolie. "Him have lost allee cash. You no pay him go inside no more, savvy? No more cash, him makee plenty bobbery. You savvy?"

"Savvy plenty, master," replied the coolie, with a knowing grin.

"You'll thank me for this to-morrow, if you

don't now," said Elliott. "Where do you intend to go?"

The old man made no immediate answer, but he leaned limply on Elliott's arm, apparently in a state of nervous collapse. Unexpectedly he turned away, hid his face in his hands against the white wall of the house, and began to sob.

"Oh, here! This won't do. Confound it, man, brace up! Don't break down before a Chinaman," cried Elliott, irritated and sorry.

"I have fallen again!" moaned the gambler, hysterically. "I am vile — yes, steeped in sin. Forty-seven pounds gone in an hour! And my one hope was to live a life that would tell for the Cross in this pagan land. I am weak, weak as water, and I have taken my child's bread and cast it unto the dogs. They robbed me. My God, why hast thou forsaken me? I hoped to win ten times my money — I needed it so!"

Elliott seized him by the arm and dragged him down the street in the ivory moonlight. The old man's face was ivory-white, and great tears trickled from the faded blue eyes.

"Don't touch me, — I am not fit for you to touch me! I never gambled before. If I only had it back again — forty-seven pounds — two months' savings. I will get it back. Let me go. I will win this time!"

170 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"You'll get a knife in your back if you go there again. I've left word to keep you out. For heaven's sake, keep cool!" implored Elliott, in great distress. He had never seen an old man break down before. It wrung his heart, and he made a clumsy attempt at consolation.

"Cheer up, now. You're not broke, are you? I can lend you a pound or so, if you need it. You'll feel better in the morning."

They reached a little park at the angle of two streets, and the gambler threw himself upon a bench. He had ceased to weep, but he looked at Elliott with a tragic face.

"You know little," he said, sombrely. "You are young and strong, but Satan stands at your back as surely as he does at mine. Pray, therefore, lest you also fall into temptation."

Elliott could think of nothing to say in reply to this.

"As for me, it is too late. And yet," throwing his hands up despairingly, "thou knowest, O Lord, if I have not served thee — laboured for thee in pagan lands with all my strength. Wasted, wasted! What was I to strive against the Adversary? I thought that I had begun a new life where all my errors would be forgotten, and now it is crushed — gone — and my child will starve among strangers."

"Tell me all about it. It'll make you feel better, and maybe I can help you," Elliott adjured him, afraid that he would grow hysterical again. "First of all, what's your name? You said you were a bookkeeper, or something, didn't you?"

The victim of chance seemed to cast about in his memory. "My name is Eaton," he announced at last, and stopped.

"Well, and what about your new life and your child? You haven't gambled them away, have you? Is your family in Hongkong?"

Eaton transferred his gaze blankly to Elliott's face, and allowed it to remain there for some seconds.

"You seem to be a good man," he said, finally.

"Not particularly, but I'd like to help you if I can," replied the adventurer.

"My little girl is coming to Hongkong. I sent for her — from the States. She will arrive tomorrow, and I have no money."

"You sent for her? You sent for an American child to come to Hongkong in the rainy season? You ought to be shot!" Elliott ejaculated.

"She was all I had, and I am an old man. I was going to begin a new life, with her help, and now I have lost the money I had saved for her coming."

172 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"What in the world made you go up against that cursed game, then?" cried Elliott, wrathfully.

"I wanted money — more money. I had a chance to make a fortune. I dare say you have never known what it is to feel ready to turn to anything to make a little money — anything, even to evil. And yet this was for a good purpose. But now I have nothing. Tell me what to do."

"I can lend you twenty pounds," said Elliott, after cogitating for a little. "That ought to tide you over your present difficulty, and you've still got your job, I suppose. Yes, I'll put twenty pounds in your daughter's hands when she arrives, on the condition that she doesn't give you a cent of it."

"You will lend me twenty pounds — you — a stranger?" cried Eaton, with a stare. "You — I can't thank you, but I will pray — no, I can't even pray!" He put his head on the back of the bench and sobbed. "You must forgive me," he said, raising his head again. "I have never found so much kindness in the world. You are right; do not trust me with a cent. I am not fit to be trusted."

"Oh, yes, you are. I shouldn't have said that," encouraged Elliott, feeling horribly embarrassed. "And now, when is your daughter coming?"

"On the Southern Mail steamer. It touched at Yokohama eight days ago, and it's due to arrive here to-morrow afternoon."

"Very good. We'll go back to Victoria in the morning, and we'll both meet the steamer. But what possessed you to send for her at this time of year? Hongkong is bad enough for strong men."

"My girl is all I have in the world, and I haven't seen her for so long," replied Eaton, visibly brightening. "Maybe it was a father's selfishness, but I reckon she needs my care."

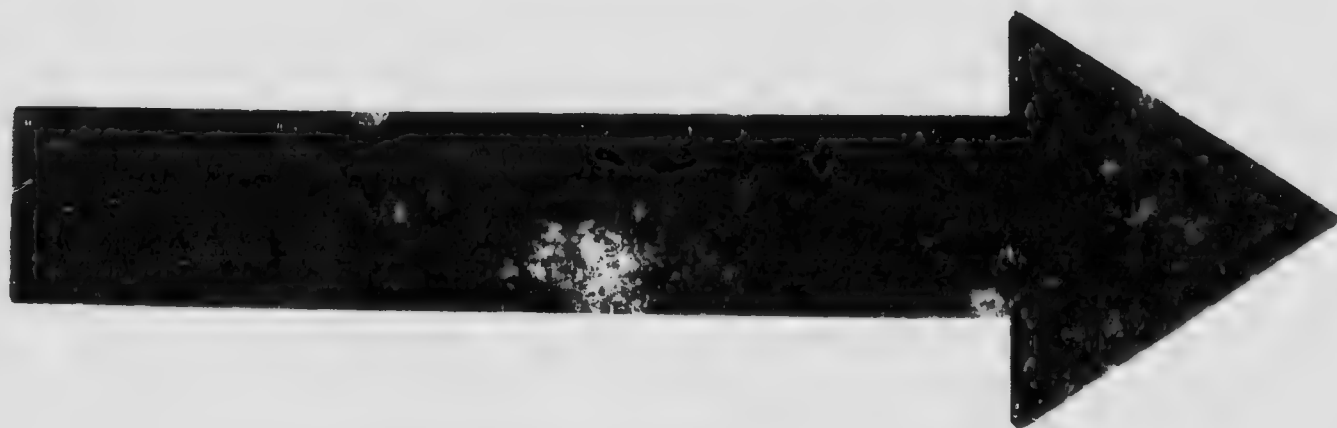
"Your care!" said Elliott, brutally. "Where are you going to sleep to-night? Come with me to my hotel."

"I had planned such a happy home," Eaton went on, as they walked through the moonlit streets. "I have had a hard life, but I had hoped to settle here in comfort with my little girl. We can do it, can't we?"

"I suppose so," replied Elliott. "Though it seems to me that Hongkong is a mighty poor place for a happy home."

"It isn't the place; it's the love and peace," the gambler rattled on, cheerfully. He appeared quite happy and restored in having thrown his cares upon Elliott's shoulders. "I have fallen into sin more than once already, but the Lord knows how sorely I have repented, and His grace is abounding. Don't you think they must have cheated me in that place?"

"Oh, no. You were just out of luck. You



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174 THE TREASURE TRAIL

should never play when you are out of luck," said Elliott, sagely.

"It seems to me that I ought to have won. I suppose you have gambled sometimes. Did you ever win?"

"Occasionally."

"Well, luck or not, I shall never stake money again. I have been treated with more mercy than I deserve. I just begin to realize the horrible pit that I barely escaped. What would have become of me? I hardly dare to think of it. You have saved me, perhaps soul as well as body."

"Oh, stop it!" Elliott exclaimed.

"I don't think of myself so much as of my little girl. I shall tell her the whole story, and she will know how to thank you better than I can."

"You'll do nothing of the sort!" cried Elliott, angrily. "She'll have troubles enough in this pestilential place without that."

During the night Elliott more than once repented of his bargain, which seemed likely to involve his having the Eaton family slung round his neck to the end of his stay in the East. The old man was well-intentioned enough; he bristled with high resolutions; but he was clearly as unfit for responsibility as a child. Elliott deeply pitied the unfortunate daughter, but he could not feel himself bound to assume the position of guardian to the pair. He

determined to meet the steamer as he had promised, hand over the promised twenty pounds, and henceforward avoid the neighbourhood of both father and daughter.

The returning boat left Macao at ten o'clock the next morning, and they reëntered the steam and rain of Hongkong harbour. At three o'clock the big Southern Mail steamer loomed slowly in sight through the haze, surrounded by a fleet of small junks and shore boats. Eaton and Elliott boarded her before any one had landed. Her decks were crowded with passengers, hurrying aimlessly about, staring over the rail or standing guard upon piles of luggage.

Elliott was making his way through the throng when some one touched his arm.

"Mr. Elliott! Is it possible you are here? What are you doing? I thought you were in India. I was so frightened — oh!"

"Margaret — Miss Laurie! Don't faint!" gasped Elliott, shocked into utter bewilderment, and scarcely believing his eyes or ears.

"I'm not going to faint. I never faint," said Margaret, weakly. "But I was so startled and frightened. Did you know my father was here?"

"Maggie!" cried Eaton, pushing past him, and in a moment the old man, whose face beamed like the sun, had his daughter in his arms.

CHAPTER XI.

ILLUMINATION

THE life of the Reverend Titus E. Laurie contained two active principles. The first of these was a tireless enthusiasm for the propagation of the principles of Methodist Christianity, and this had moved him ever since he could remember. The second was solicitude for his daughter Margaret, which, necessarily, had been operative for only the last twenty years. During these twenty years he had been absent from America almost all the time; the total number of weeks he had spent with Margaret would scarcely have aggregated a year; so that his affection was obliged to take the form of voluminous letters from out-of-the-way places in Asia and Polynesia, and of remittances of more money than he could afford.

But his religious work took always first place in his mind. There never was, one might suppose, a man more clearly "called to the work" than Titus E. Laurie. He cared little for theology. He had never had any doubts of anything; if he had

had them, they would not have troubled him. His temper was purely practical, and the ideal which filled his soul was the redemption of the world from its state of sin and death by the forces of the gospel as systematized by John Wesley. He was tolerant of other Protestant churches, but not of Roman Catholicism. He had preached when he was fifteen; at eighteen he was a "local preacher," and at twenty he was in full charge of a church of his own in South Rock, New York.

He was shifted about on that "circuit" according to the will of the Conference till the opening of the war, when he went to the front as an army nurse. In three months, however, he came back, vaguely in disgrace. It appeared that he had been unable to resist the entreaties of his patients, and had supplied them surreptitiously with tabooed chewing tobacco and liquor. But this was an error of kindness and inexperience; it was easily condoned by his supporters, and he resumed his more regular pastoral work. In 1866 he was much in demand as a revivalist.

Mr. Laurie had charge of the funds of his church as well as of its souls. It was hard for a non-producer to live in the period of high prices succeeding the war. Just what he did with the money in his custody was never definitely ascertained; probably he could not have said himself; but he was

178 THE TREASURE TRAIL

unable to restore it when the time came. He did not face his parishioners; he left in the night for Mexico, leaving behind a letter of agonized remorse and promises of amendment.

In Mexico he worked for two years in the mines and on a coffee plantation, and sent home the whole amount of his embezzlement in monthly instalments. At the same time he undertook to conduct Methodist prayer-meetings among the mine labourers, who were chiefly Indians and half-castes. This brought him into collision with his employer, the local priest, and his prospective converts. He was threatened, stoned, ducked, and menaced with murder, but he persisted and actually succeeded in establishing a tiny Methodist community, which survived for six months after he left it.

Laurie was forgiven by his church, and returned to the North, but not to resume pastoral work. He became a bookkeeper in New York; but the evangelist's instinct was too strong for him, and he took to mission work on the lower East Side. After a year of this, he succeeded in getting himself sent to the Sandwich Islands as a missionary, from which post he returned in five years, in disgrace once more. There were rumours of a shady transaction in smuggled opium, in which he had been involved, though not to his own pecuniary benefit.

He remained in America this time for three or four years, and married a lady much older than himself. These domestic arrangements were broken up, however, by his leaving once more for the South Seas, having been able to secure another appointment for the mission field. He never saw his wife again. She died a year later in giving birth to a daughter, who was taken in charge by an aunt living in the West.

Since that time his labours had extended over much of Polynesia, with digressions into Africa and China. He had sailed the first missionary schooner, the *Olive Branch*, among the Islands, and he had preached on the beach to brown warriors armed to the teeth, who had never before seen a white man. But the Reverend Titus E. Laurie escaped with his life. He thrived on danger, from the Fiji spears to the typhoons that came near to swamping his wretchedly found vessel on every voyage.

And yet he did not escape scathless. It was rumoured that the fascinations of certain of his female converts in Tahiti had proved too much for him; a scandal was averted by his leaving the station. He was accused of pearling in forbidden waters; and in the end he had to resign his command of the *Olive Branch*, as it was conclusively proved that the missionary schooner had run opium in

180 THE TREASURE TRAIL

her hold with the connivance of her chief. The Rev. Titus E. Laurie, in fact, was granite against hostility when in the regular line of his work. He was made of the stuff of martyrs, but responsibilities found him weak, and he could no more make head against a sudden strong temptation than he could deliberately commit a crime.

Elliott gleaned these details of Mr. Laurie's career by scraps in the course of the next three weeks, but just how the missionary had come to change his name and settle in Victoria was a mystery to him. At any rate, Laurie, or Eaton, as he persisted in calling himself, had secured a position as accountant in the godown of one of the largest English importing firms, and seemed to propose to spend the remainder of his life in that station. He had now been there for over two months, and Elliott presently discovered that he was already in the habit of visiting the mission settlement at Kowloons and taking part in the meetings held there. The missionaries on duty found him a valuable assistant, and, as Elliott discovered, had made proposals to him to join them; but these Eaton had refused.

Accustomed to the tropics, the heat did not affect him much, but Elliott at once insisted that a house must be rented upon the Peak for Miss Margaret. Coming directly from the sparkling air of the Amer-

ican plains, the girl could never have lived in the hot steam of the lower town. Laurie demurred a little on the score of expense, — not that he grudged the money, but because he did not have it. Elliott said nothing, but began to look about, and was lucky enough to obtain the lease of a cottage upon the mountain-top at a nominal figure, considering the locality. It had been taken by a retired naval officer who was unexpectedly obliged to return to England and was glad to dispose of the lease, so that Elliott bound himself to pay only eighty dollars a month for the remainder of the summer.

He had the lease transferred to Laurie's new name. "If you say a word to your daughter about this," he warned him when he handed over the document, "I'll tell her about your sporting life in Macao."

The missionary smiled uneasily, and then looked grave. "I can never begin to thank you, much less repay you. I am not much good now, — nothing but a weak old man, but my prayers —"

"Oh, cut it out!" said Elliott, impatiently.

Laurie flushed.

"I beg your pardon; I didn't mean that, of course. Only, you know, your daughter and I are old friends, and you mustn't talk of gratitude for any little thing I do."

"But there is one thing I wish," replied the old

182 THE TREASURE TRAIL

man, after an embarrassed moment. "I insist that you share the cottage with us."

Elliott hesitated, wondering whether it would be judicious, and yielded.

"Certainly I will," he said, "and glad to have the chance."

Margaret was delighted at the appearance of the cottage, a tiny bungalow, deep-verandahed, standing amid a grove of China pines that rustled perpetually with a cooling murmur. The highway leading to it was more like a conservatory than a street.

"You dear old papa!" she exclaimed, sitting down rapturously upon the steps, after having rushed through the building from front to rear, startling the dignified and spotless Chinese cook which they had inherited from the former tenants. "How good you are to get all this for me! It must have cost such a lot, too. Mr. Elliott says that houses up here cost two hundred dollars a month. You didn't pay all that, did you? Now we must be very economical, and we'll all work. I'm going to discharge that Chinaman."

"You can't work. You'd scandalize the Peak," said Elliott.

"I don't care anything for the Peak. I'm going to fire that Chineese first of all. I'm afraid of him, he looks so mysteriously solemn, as if he knew all

sorts of Oriental poisons, and I never can learn pidgin-English. No, I'm going to cook, and I'll make you doughnuts and fried chicken and mashed potatoes and real American coffee and all the good old United States things that you haven't tasted for so long."

"But you can't do anything like that. No white woman works in this country," Elliott expostulated.

"But I shall," she retorted, firmly.

And she did, — or, rather, she tried hard to do it. But it turned out to be difficult, and often impossible, to procure the ingredients for the preparation of the promised American dishes, and she was by increasing degrees forced back upon the fare of the country, which she did not quite know how to deal with. It did not matter, — not even when it came to living chiefly upon canned goods, which usually were American enough to satisfy the most ardent patriot. The three had come to regard the affair in the light of a prolonged picnic, and they agreed that it was too hot to eat doughnuts and fried chicken, anyway.

Laurie still went down the mountain to the sweltering lower city every morning and did not return till sunset. Elliott and Margaret usually spent the day together, for he had temporarily abandoned the search for the mate. An unconquerable horror of

184 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the town had filled him, and he silenced an uneasy conscience by telling himself that he would learn nothing new if he did go there.

Sometimes he helped Margaret to wash the breakfast things, and then he sat lazily in a long chair on the wide veranda, smoking an excellent Manila cheroot and reading the *China Daily Mail*. He could hear Margaret softly moving about inside the house; she dropped casual remarks to him through the open window, and usually she ended by coming out and sitting with him, reading or sewing with an industry that even the climate could not tame. Below them the steamy rain-clouds drifted and wavered over the city; Hongkong Roads ran like a zigzag strip of gray steel out to the ocean, but it was cool, if damp, upon the Peak, and the two had reached such a degree of intimacy that sometimes for an hour they did not say a word.

To Elliott this period bore an inexpressible charm. For many years his associates had been almost altogether men, the rough and strong men of action of the West; and the graceful domesticity that a womanly woman instinctively gathers about her was new to him, or so old that it was almost forgotten. They were alone together, for the ex-missionary scarcely counted, and they knew no one else on the Island. It was almost as if the Island had been a desert one, and they wrecked upon it. They were

isolated in the midst of this great, torrid, bustling half-Chinese colony, and in that most improbable spot he found a little corner of perfume with such quiet and peace as he had scarcely imagined. He did not quite understand its charm, and he was not much given to analyzing his sensations. It was enough for him that he was happy as he had been before in his life, and he thanked the trail for leading him to this, and tried to forget that the trail was not yet ended.

But he was astonished to find that Margaret made no reference to her father's change of name, and seemed to accept it with as little surprise as if she supposed an alias to be a regular Anglo-Chinese custom. Elliott was afraid to speak of the matter, but his amazement grew till he could no longer restrain his curiosity, and he asked her one morning, pointblank.

"Miss Margaret, do you know why your father has changed his name?"

"Yes, I know," she replied, looking slightly troubled. "I can't tell you the reason, though. But it was for nothing disgraceful, — though I don't need to tell you that. He had to do it; I can't say any more."

"I beg your pardon — I merely wondered — of course I knew there was some good reason. It was none of my business, anyway," Elliott blundered,

186 THE TREASURE TRAIL

privately wondering what fiction Laurie had dished up for his daughter's consumption.

"There is the best of reasons. My father is one of the noblest men in the world. You don't know him yet, but he knows you. He is very keen, and he has been studying you; he told me so."

"Oh!" said Elliott.

"Yes. And he has the very highest opinion of you, I may tell you, if your modesty will stand it. He says you have helped him a great deal. Have you?"

"Not so far as I know."

"Well, he thinks you have, which comes to the same thing. Some day he may be able to do something for you — something really great."

"He has done it already in bringing you out here," said Elliott, and was sorry directly he had said it.

"I don't like speeches like that," said Miss Margaret. "Now, you've never told me why you are here yourself."

"Didn't I tell you that I came on business?"

"Yes, but what sort of business? Another hunt for easy fortunes, I suppose, such as you promised to give up. How much do you stand to win this time?"

"What would you say if I said millions?"

"I'd say that you didn't appear to be looking for them very hard."

Elliott squirmed in the long chair and moaned plaintively.

"I haven't seen you looking for them at all, in fact. Since we moved to the Peak, you've done nothing but sit in that long chair."

"Yes, hang it, you're right," Elliott exclaimed, sitting up. "It's true. I've been wasting my time for two weeks, spending my partners' money and not doing the work I'm paid to do."

"You must do it, then. Tell me, what is it?"

"No, I can't tell it, not even to you. It's not my own secret. I've got three partners in it, and my particular task is to hunt down a man whom I never set eyes on. I've chased him a matter of ten thousand miles, and he's supposed to be somewhere in this city," looking down at the wet smoke that hung over the bustling port.

Somewhere under that haze was the clue to the drowned million, and he felt the shame of his idleness. He had been philandering away his time, and at this juncture when every day was priceless. He turned back to the girl.

"Thank you for waking me up. Your advice always comes at the psychological moment," he said. "My holiday's over. To-morrow I start work again."

188 THE TREASURE TRAIL

He went down to the city that afternoon, in fact, but the old perplexity returned upon him when he tried to think how and where he was to begin his search. He went the rounds of the steamer offices and scrutinized the outgoing passenger-lists for the past three weeks. There was no name that he recognized. He tried the consulates again without any result. He could think of no new move, and he was irritated at his own lack of resource.

Yet the Hongkong Club was the centre of all the foreign life of the colony; it was visited daily by almost every white man on the island, and if Burke, or Baker, were in the city, he would be certain to gravitate there sooner or later. So Elliott took to spending days in that institution, eagerly scrutinizing every big-boned elderly man of seafaring appearance who entered. But, as he often reflected, he might rub elbows with his man daily and not know it; and he regretted more than ever that he had not obtained a full description of the mate.

After a week of this sedentary sort of man-hunting, he became imbued with a deep sense of the futility of the thing. It was only by the merest chance that he could hope to learn anything. It was chance that had assisted the affair up to the present; the whole scheme was one gigantic gamble, discovered, financed, and operated by sheer good

luck, and the run seemed exhausted. Anyhow, he thought fatalistically, good fortune was as likely to strike him on the Peak as in the city, and he took to spending his days on the veranda once more. He cabled again to Henninger:

"Track totally lost. What shall do?"

Still, he did not totally abandon the search, but rather he made it a pretext for little exploring expeditions round the city and suburbs with Margaret, accompanied by her father when he could get away from business. They prowled about Kowloons, and they all visited Macao together, where Laurie exhibited the blindest oblivion of his recent lapse, and lectured his companions most edifyingly upon the curse of gambling, the degeneracy of the Portuguese race, and the corruption of the Church of Rome.

They visited the shipyards opposite Hongkong, saw the naval headquarters and the missionary station, and, a week later, all three of them crossed to Formosa on Saturday and returned on Sunday, merely for the refreshing effect of the open sea breezes.

The heavy Chinese smell came off the coast as they returned into Hongkong Roads late on Sunday night. Elliott sickened at the thought of resuming the search that had become hateful to him, in a city that, but for one thing, had become intolerable.

190 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Margaret was leaning over the bows with him, watching the prow rise and fall in splashes of orange and gold phosphorescence. The missionary was dozing in a chair somewhere astern. A score of coolies were gambling and talking loudly between decks.

"This is all so wonderful to me!" said Margaret, suddenly. "Only a month or two ago I was in Nebraska, but it seems years. I had never seen anything; I had no idea what a great and wonderful place the world was. I think of it all, and I sometimes wonder if I am the same girl. But do you know what it makes me think most?"

"It makes me feel," she went on, as Elliott did not reply, "how great and noble my father must be to have given his life to help this great, swarming heathen world. I never knew there were so many heathens; I thought they were mostly Methodists and Episcopalians. Don't you think he really is the best man in the world?"

"I never saw a man so full of high ideals," Elliott answered.

He had answered at random, scarcely listening to what she said. But the sound of her voice through the darkness had brought illumination to him, and he realized why he had shrunk from returning to the gold-hunt. He had found a higher ideal himself, and as he thought of his years and

years of ineffectual, topsyturvy scrambling after a fortune which he would not have known how to keep if he had found, they seemed to him inexpressibly futile and childish. He had missed what was most worth while in life — but it was not too late. He hoped, and doubted, and his heart beat suddenly with an almost painful thrilling.

Her white muslin sleeve almost touched his shoulder, but her face was turned from him, looking wide-eyed toward the dark China coast. He knew that she was meditating upon the virtues of her evangelistic father. He did not speak, but she turned her head quickly and looked at him, with a puzzled, almost frightened glance.

"What's the matter?" he said, almost in a whisper.

"I don't know," Margaret murmured, and her eyes dropped. For a moment she stood silent; she seemed to palpitate; then she roused herself with a little shrug.

"I am nervous to-night. For a moment I had a shudder — I felt as if something had happened, or was happening — I don't know what. Come, let's go back and find father. We're nearly .." She thrust her arm under his with a return to her usual frank confidence.

"I'm so glad you're here, too," she said, impulsively.

192 THE TREASURE TRAIL

This was not what Elliott wanted not what he had seen revealed suddenly between the blaze of the stars and the flame of the sea. But he would not tell her so — not yet. Not for anything would he shatter their open comradeship.

CHAPTER XII.

OPEN WAR

THE day after he returned from Formosa Elliott received a reply to his cablegram, which said, simply :

“ Find it. Buck up!

“ HENNINGER.”

It was easy to give the order, Elliott thought. But during the next few days the heat was terrible, even for Hongkong. On the Peak, men sweltered; in the lower city, they died. It rained, without cease, a rain that seemed to steam up from the hot earth as fast as it fell, and, to add terror to discomfort, half a dozen cases of cholera were discovered in the Chinese city, and an epidemic was feared. Most of the offices employing white clerks closed daily at noon, and there was a great exodus of the foreign population to Yokohama.

On Sunday it cooled slightly, however, and the rain ceased. To gain what advantage they could

194 THE TREASURE TRAIL

of the respite, Margaret and Elliott walked out to the edge of the mountain-top, a quarter of a mile away, and spent the forenoon there. The missionary dozed at home; he slept a great deal during the hot weather.

They were returning for lunch, which Margaret persistently refused to call "tiffin," and had almost reached the bungalow, when a man stepped down from the veranda and came toward them along the deeply shaded street. At the first glance Elliott thought he recognized the graceful, alert figure, and he was right. It was Sevier, who had just left the house.

The Alabaman stopped short when he met them, and lifted his hat, without, however, betraying any particular surprise.

"Good mo'nin', Elliott. So you're in Hong-kong?"

"As you see," replied Elliott, a trifle stiffly. "Were you looking for me?"

"Not particularly. I was looking for another man."

"How long have you been here?"

"Oh, about a couple of weeks."

There was a pause, which Elliott felt to be a nervous one.

"How are the bereaved relatives of your wreck's crew?" Sevier went on.

"I don't know. Have you found the man you were looking for?"

"Not exactly. Have you?"

"No."

There was another pause. Margaret was looking puzzled and impatient.

"I beg your pardon, I'm delaying you," said Sevier, with a slight bow toward the girl. "I wish you'd dine with me at the Club to-night at seven o'clock. Can you? I have an idea that I can tell you something that you'd be glad to know."

Elliott reflected for a moment, with some suspicion. "Thank you, I shall be delighted," he accepted, formally, at last.

"At seven o'clock," repeated Sevier, bowing once more, and passing on.

"Who was that man? I never saw him before. What were you talking about?" demanded Margaret, when they were out of ear-shot.

"To tell you the truth, I don't exactly know," Elliott replied, in a sort of abstracted excitement.

Margaret went to her own room to take off her hat, and Elliott turned into the big, darkened sitting-room, where he was confronted with the spectacle of the missionary seated beside the table with his head buried in his arms.

"What did that man want here?" Elliott de-

196 THE TREASURE TRAIL

manded, hastily. "Why, what's the matter with you?"

Laurie raised a face that was covered with perspiration, and haggard with some emotion. His mouth trembled, and he looked half-dazed.

"That man!" he moaned, vaguely. "Oh, that man!"

"Yes. What did he want?"

"What did he want?" repeated Laurie, clearly incapable of coherent thought. "Oh, heavens! what did he not want?"

Elliott mixed an iced glass of water and lime-juice, for the missionary would never touch spirits.

"Here, drink this, and try to brace up," he said.

Laurie drank it like a docile child, and looked up with fringed eyes.

"I have done wrong," he said, pathetically. "I have sinned often. I have fallen times past counting."

"I know it," said Elliott. "What have you been doing now?"

"The question is, what am I going to do?" replied the old man, with a flash of animation. "It has all been for her—whatever errors I have made. No one can say that I have ever profited by a dollar that was not honestly my own."

"Well — all right. But for goodness' sake try to tell me what Sevier was asking about."

Laurie hesitated for a long time.

"It was about the ship — the *Clara McClay*," he produced, at last.

Elliott stared, speechless for a moment, shocked into utter bewilderment.

"The *Clara McClay*?" he babbled. "The —" he was going to say the "gold-ship." "What do you know about her? Where did you hear of her?"

"I was on her. I was wrecked with her."

"The devil you were!"

"Yes, wrecked, and saved only by the Lord's wonderful mercy. I floated about for days in an open boat."

"Look here," said Elliott. "I rather fancy that you're running more risk now than you were in that open boat. You don't know what deep waters you're sailing. Sevier's a dangerous man. If you want me to help you, you'll have to tell me the whole story."

The missionary acquiesced with the alacrity which he always showed in casting his mundane responsibilities upon stronger shoulders.

"I am ashamed to tell you the story," he said. "And yet it was not my fault. At least, I had no intention of doing any wrong whatever. I

198 THE TREASURE TRAIL

was in the work at Durban under the British Mission Board. I had been there for two years, and I may say that my efforts had been abundantly blessed," he added, with humble pride.

"But I was tempted, and I was weak. I had a large sum of money in my hands — nearly five hundred dollars — which the Board had supplied for the building of a new chapel. I did not covet it for myself, but my salary was long overdue, and it was past my time to send a remittance to my daughter. The fund would not be needed for months, and I would have paid back every cent of it."

"So you took it," Elliott interrupted.

"I sent the remittance. About two weeks later an officer of the Mission Society came through South Africa, and I was called upon for an account of the fund. I was disgraced. I could have escaped, but I would not do that. I started to England in charge of the officer to be tried for embezzlement. There was an American steamer sailing from Durban, and we embarked on her. The name of the steamer was the *Clara McClay*.

"I stayed in my cabin all the time, so I do not know anything of the voyage. I believe we called at Delagoa Bay for cargo and passengers. We had been out over a week when the ship struck. It was very dark, with a high sea running, and she

seemed to be breaking up. They launched several boats, but all were sunk before they left the ship's side.

"The Society's officer went in one of them and tried to induce me to go with him, but I have been many years at sea, and I knew the risk of trying to launch boats in that position. He was drowned, with most of the ship's company. At daylight there were only five of us left, — the mate, three Boers who had been passengers, and myself. The sea was quieter then, and we managed to get the last of the boats overboard and to get clear.

"The mate had been severely injured about the head by falling from the bridge when she struck, and I felt sure that he could not live unless we were picked up soon. There was no use in landing on the desert reef where we had struck, so we sailed north with a fair wind. For there was fortunately a sail in the boat. We hoped to get into the track of India-bound vessels, — or at least I hoped for it, for the Boers knew nothing of navigation, and the mate was growing to be either delirious or unconscious most of the time.

"It was a week before we were picked up. I won't tell you of its horrors. The water ran out, under the sun of the equator. The Boers drank sea-water, in spite of everything I could say, and all three went mad and threw themselves overboard.

200 THE TREASURE TRAIL

I just managed to keep alive and to keep the mate alive by dipping myself frequently in the sea and drenching his clothes with the bailer. But he died about the fourth day. He was conscious for a few hours before he died, and I did what I could to prepare his mind.

"I had to throw his body overboard. I could not have kept it in the boat — in that heat. But I kept his oilskin clothes and his uniform cap, thinking they might be needful. He had nearly a hundred pounds in sovereigns in a belt, also, which he told me to take, as he had no relatives, and I took them.

"It rained the night after he died, and that saved me. Two days later I was picked up by an Italian steamer, called the *Andrea Sforzia*."

Elliott emitted an ejaculation.

"Yes, it was providential," went on the missionary, patiently. "And then I saw an opportunity of burying my past. I trust it was not dishonourable. The Italian officers of the steamer could speak very little English, and as I was wearing the mate's uniform cap they took me to be an officer of the wrecked ship. I would not have told them a falsehood, but I did not undeceive them. They took me to Bombay, and they made me go to the American consul, but I escaped as soon as I could, and concealed myself in the city for a couple of weeks. Then I came on to Hongkong, where I hoped —"

"Do you know just where the *Clara McClay* was wrecked?" Elliott demanded, trying to keep cool in the face of this revelation.

"That is what that man asked me. It must have been off the northwest coast of Madagascar."

"But don't you know the exact spot?"

"How could I? I was never out of my cabin till the night she struck."

Elliott burst into a bitter and uncontrollable roar of laughter. This, then, was the end of the trail he had followed from the centre of the United States at such expense and with such hopes. It ended in a man with whom he had unsuspectingly lived for a month, an aged ex-missionary of infirm moral habits.

"That man who was here asked me the same thing," repeated Laurie, plaintively. "Why did he want to know where she struck — or why do you want to know? My God! I had almost forgotten it!" he cried, shuddering. "What shall I do? How can I save myself?"

"What on earth do you mean?" cried Elliott.

"He threatened me with disgrace — and arrest, unless I would tell him where the ship went down. He said he would expose me to the British Mission Board — and he would put all the proofs of — of more than that, of other things, in the hands of my daughter. I deserve to be punished.

202 THE TREASURE TRAIL

I can face even disgrace for myself — but not for her — not for my little girl."

"No, she mustn't hear of anything of the sort," said Elliott. He considered the situation for several minutes, walking to and fro. "Why did you tell everybody that the ship went down in deep water?" he asked.

The missionary started. "How did you know that I did? It was a sudden temptation. The consul in Bombay asked me if she foundered at sea, and I said she did. It made no difference to any one, and it seemed safer. You must remember the state I was in, after a week in an open boat without water."

"Well, don't worry," said Elliott. "I dare say you didn't mean any harm, but that little remark of yours has cost a good deal of trouble and a good many thousand dollars. But I'll see that Sevier doesn't trouble you. I know him pretty well. I'm going to dine with him to-night, in fact, and I'll explain things to him."

Laurie brightened wonderfully at this assurance. During the past month he had come to have an almost childlike trust in Elliott's powers of saving him from troubles, and at lunch he had almost recovered his customary serene benignity. But Elliott was far from that placid state of mind. The whole campaign would have to be altered. There

was now no hope of learning the location of the wreck from any of her survivors. So far as he could see, there was only the chance of searching all that portion of the channel till her bones were discovered, and it was ten to one that the Arab coasters would have been before them. But at any rate he could now meet Sevier without fear; he had no longer any plan to conceal.

He spent that afternoon in anxious thought, and finally wrote a long letter to Henninger, detailing his adventures on the man-hunt that had ended in a mare's nest. As the letter might take over a month to reach Zanzibar, he stopped at the cable office on his way to the Club, and sent the following message:

"Mate dead, taking secret with him. Shall I join you? Letter follows."

Sevier was waiting for him when he arrived at the Club's massive façade, and a table was already reserved in the farthest corner of the dining-room. The air was heavy under the swinging punkahs, for it had come on to rain again, and the drip and splash of the streets came through the open windows.

They discussed the soup in silence, and with the introduction of a violently flavoured entrée they talked of the rain.

"The weather's no fit subject for conversation

204 THE TREASURE TRAIL

in this country," Sevier broke off all at once. "Look here, Elliott, you're up against it, aren't you?"

"I don't know that I am, particularly," answered the treasure-hunter, coolly. "You're in something of a blind alley yourself, I fancy."

"I don't mind admitting that I am, for the moment. What do you know about the *Clara McClay*?"

"Nothing — except that she was wrecked."

"But you know what her cargo was?"

"Yes, I do. Do you know where that cargo is now?"

"No, I don't. But she never sunk in deep water — I know that. She's ashore somewhere in the Mozambique Channel. Now I propose to you, Elliott, that we join forces. You're playing a lone hand, I reckon, and it takes money to play a game like this. I have a partner with me, and we've got \$25,000 to spend. What do you say?"

"I'd like to hear a little more," said Elliott.

"Well, I'll play my cards face up. Look here. That gold was stolen from the treasury at Pretoria by a gang of crooked Dutchmen. You may know that. My partner, Carlton, was in Pretoria at the time, and he got wind of it, and found out what ship it was going to be sent on. Do you know what we did? We squared the ship's mate, Burke, to pile

the old hooker up on the Afu Bata reef, off Mozambique. It cost us five thousand cash to make the deal with him, and we had to promise him a share of the plunder. Now do you see why we're interested?"

Elliott saw, and he saw furthermore that the affair was revealing mazes of complexity that he had not suspected.

"Yes," he said, trying not to look surprised. "Then you must know where she was wrecked, after all."

"No, because the mate threw us down—the thief! He took our money and did us dirt. We hung around the Afu Bata reef in a dhow for three weeks, off and on, and the *Clara McClay* never showed up. At last we put into Zanzibar, and found that she hadn't been sighted anywhere since she left Lorenzo Marques. A little later we heard that she had been wrecked, and that the mate had been picked up, and that he had said that she was sunk in deep water."

"But that wasn't the mate at all," Elliott remarked.

"Yes, I know. I heard the story from that sanctimonious old hypocrite on the Peak. But it was the mate that sunk her. It was Burke that ran her ashore somewhere and figured to have all the plunder himself. It wasn't his fault that he

206 THE TREASURE TRAIL

got drowned or whatever happened to him. The question now is — where is that wreck?"

Elliott laughed. "Good Lord, that's the question I've been trying to solve for three months."

"There is one man that knows."

"Who is it?"

"Your old sky-pilot."

"You're all wrong," said Elliott. "Old Laurie, or Eaton, knows nothing at all about the thing. And I should like to know how in the world you came to take up his trail."

"The same as you did, I expect," replied Sevier, winking. "We went from Zanzibar up to Port Said, and waited there till we heard about the mate being picked up and going to Bombay. I went there too, as you know, having the honour to be your fellow passenger, but I never suspected you of being interested in the wreck — not at first.

"In Bombay I lost the trail, same as you did. But when I heard the American consul describe his man I made sure it couldn't be the real thing. It was some fakir, and why should anybody fake the thing unless he was up to some game. It made me keener than ever. Lord! I worked like a slave in that accursed city. I searched every consulate, and the hotels and the boarding-houses. I found that a man answering my description had come to the

Planters' Hotel about the time the counterfeit mate turned up. I found that he had gone — sailed for Hongkong under a different name. I cabled Carlton, my partner, and we came here.

"It was you who helped us here. I spotted you on the street a week ago, had you followed to the Peak, and there you were, living hand in glove with my fakir. I went up there this morning, after learning that you had gone out, and I put the question straight to the white-headed old hypocrite. He went all to pieces, just as I expected, but he wouldn't tell me anything. However, we have a way to force him."

"Lost labour," remarked Elliott, coolly. "He didn't know even that the *Clara McClay* was loaded with gold."

"Don't you believe it!" said Sevier, leaning impressively across the table. "Elliott, that old parson is the slipperiest beggar between Africa and Oregon. I know all about his doings in the past. As like as not he murdered the mate himself —"

Elliott gave an exclamation of derision.

"Anyhow, I'm sure that he made up a plant with Burke to turn the trick on us. He knows where that gold is now; you can bank on that! And if you've been living with him for a month and don't know too, you're not the clever man I take you to be."

208 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"I think you're just a little too clever yourself," Elliott replied. "I'll play my cards face up, too. I know just as much as you do about the location of that wreck, and that old missionary doesn't know half as much. You've sized up his character wrong. He's merely a simple, kind-hearted, unworldly old gentleman with no moral backbone. If he knew where all that gold was, I don't believe he'd go after it. He might steal a hundred dollars if he saw it lying handy and happened to need it, but he wouldn't take any interest in a million that he couldn't see. As for his conspiring with Burke, much less killing him, that's sheer bosh. He doesn't know where the *Clara McClay* is, and I don't either."

"You're too secretive for me," said Sevier, looking downcast. "You won't mind if I say candidly that I think you're bluffing. Don't tell me that you haven't found out anything from that fellow Laurie, or Eaton, as he calls himself. Something is preventing you from sailing back to Africa and fishing up that million. I think we can supply what is lacking to you. We need you; you need us. Then join us, and we'll work together."

"You are right," Elliott agreed. "There is something that prevents me from going there, and that is the fact that I don't know where to go. But I don't mind admitting that I'm going to try to find

out. I have partners with me, too, and we have a little money to throw away."

"How many partners have you?" Sevier inquired.

"Three."

"Well, bring them all in. We'll share and share alike."

Elliott seriously considered this proposition for a couple of minutes. But he knew that Henninger would accept no such arrangement.

"I couldn't make such a deal without consulting the other men," he said. "And I know that the chief of our gang would never stand for it. He's rather a whole hog or nothing man, and I'm a little that way myself. No, I'm afraid we'll have to work separately."

"Is that your final word?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, I'm sorry. Excuse me a moment," said Sevier, getting up hastily. He went out of the dining-room, but returned almost immediately. "I just then caught sight of a man I wanted to speak to," he explained. "Then I can't induce you to go shares with us?"

"I'm afraid not, thank you," replied Elliott.

"It's a fair race for a million, then, and let the best man win! But it seems a fool business for us to cut one another's throats. We've made you the

210 THE TREASURE TRAIL

best proposals we can, but we feel that we have prior rights on that cargo, and we'll fight for it if necessary."

"We'll try to meet you half-way," said Elliott, carelessly. "And isn't it absurd to talk of prior rights when the whole thing is little better than a steal?"

"A steal? Not a bit of it. The ship is sunk outside the three-mile limit in neutral seas. It's treasure-trove."

"I've been trying to look at it that way myself," replied Elliott. "But I fancy some government or other would claim it if they heard of it. It's war, then, is it?"

"That'll come soon enough. Let's have peace while we can," Sevier responded, poking at the roast beef, which lay a tepid and soggy mass on his plate. "I must apologize to my guest. I've spoiled your dinner for you. It's stone cold — or as near it as anything ever gets in this country. Let me order some more."

"No — don't!" said Elliott, sickening at the thought of food in that reeking atmosphere. "It's too hot and wet to eat. This climate is getting too much for me."

"Thinking of trying Africa? Look here, you come around to my place, and I'll mix you a cold drink, anyway. I found a plant the other day that

tastes like mint, and I'll give you as close an imitation of a Baltimore julep as can be had in China."

There were half a dozen palanquins waiting about the front of the Club as usual, and Sevier gave the coolies an address which Elliott did not catch. The bearers left Queen's Road and turned up a street leading to the mountain, which they ascended for several minutes, and finally they stopped in the rain, which was now falling heavily. It was one of the beautiful and shaded streets half-way up the slope, and they were opposite a small bungalow that showed a glimmer of light through drawn rattar shutters.

"This is where Carlton and I have lived for the last fortnight," said Sevier, getting out. "We can't afford residences on the Peak, like you — and, Lord! how we have sizzled here!"

He led the way to the door, which he opened with a latch-key, and turned into a large sitting-room, lighted with an oil-lamp. The floor was bare; the room was almost devoid of furniture, containing only a couple of long chairs, a camp-chair, and a plain wooden table. On the table was the remnants of a meal, with a couple of empty ale-bottles. The windows were shut and closely covered with the blinds, and the air of the room was intolerably hot and close.

212 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Carlton's been dining by himself to-night," said Sevier, without appearing to observe the heat. "He'll be back in a few minutes, and meanwhile we'll have our drink."

He produced a bottle from an ice-box, and was crushing some ice, when the door clicked open and shut again. A heavily built man appeared, his white duck clothing hanging limply upon him.

"How are you, old man!" said Sevier, glancing up. "Elliott, this is my friend, Mr. Carlton. He knows all about you."

Carlton acknowledged the introduction by a nod and a searching glance. He was a dark and heavy-faced man of perhaps forty, with a thick brown moustache over lips that were small and close, and a small cold gray eye.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Elliott. Yes, I've heard of you," he remarked, briefly. He sat down in the vacant cane chair and began to fill a curved briar pipe, which he smoked with much apparent satisfaction.

Sevier presently handed around three glasses crowned with the Chinese herb that tasted like mint. The whole concoction did not taste much like a Southern julep, but it was cooling. "Here's luck for all of us!" said Sevier, and they drank.

There was a silence for a time, while the heat grew more and more unbearable.

"Why not have a window open?" Elliott inquired, at last. "Don't you find it hot here?"

"No. Leave them closed," said Carlton, brusquely.

There was another long silence, while Carlton smoked imperturbably. Elliott began to feel slightly nervous; he scarcely knew why. Every one in the room seemed to be waiting for something.

"Damn the rain!" Sevier suddenly ejaculated with irritation, and Carlton rolled an admonishing eye upon him without speaking. Elliott set down his empty glass and arose.

"Have another drink," urged Sevier. "Sit down."

"No, thank you. I must go," Elliott began.

"No. Sit down!" Carlton gruffly interrupted.

Taken by surprise, Elliott sat down. The rain splashed on the veranda in the silence.

"But I really must go. I have to get to the Peak," he said again, once more getting up; but Sevier held up a warning hand. Outside was heard the rhythmical grunt of sedan-coolies. There were steps on the veranda. Sevier hurried to the door and opened it, and, to Elliott's amazement,

214 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the missionary appeared in the lamplight, his face streaming with rain and perspiration, while he surveyed the group with an air of apprehension which he endeavoured to cover with dignity.

CHAPTER XIII.

FIRST BLOOD

"You sent for me, I think, — gentlemen —" hesitated Laurie, still standing near the doorway.

Sevier bustled forward, led him in and closed the door. "Yes, yes, certainly. It was mighty good of you to come. Your friend is here already, you see."

"I didn't send for you. What did you come here for?" demanded Elliott, his mind becoming clouded with suspicions.

"It was this gentleman," said the missionary, indicating Carlton with evident distrust. "He ordered me to come here — in terms that I could not well refuse. What do you want me to do?"

"Very little, and nothing hard," Sevier answered, brightly. He brought another chair from an adjoining room, and placed it beside the table. "Sit down. Will you have a drink? No? Well, we merely want you to tell us what you know of the wreck of the *Clara McClay*."

Laurie was trembling visibly. "I told you this

216 THE TREASURE TRAIL

morning what I know. Do you want me to go over it again?"

"Oh, no. Not that. We want to know where the wreck lies."

"I told you that I know no more about it than you do," protested the missionary. "How could I, when I was always in my cabin till she struck, and then adrift in an open boat for a week?"

"That won't do!" broke in Carlton, stonily. "Out with it!"

"My dear sir, don't be unreasonable," Laurie pleaded. "How can I tell you things I know nothing of?"

Carleton looked at him for a moment, and then turned with a nod to Sevier. The young Alabaman produced a long, heavy strap from under the table, and with a movement of incredible celerity he dropped the loop over Laurie's head and shoulders. In another second he was buckled fast to the back of his chair, before he had comprehended that anything was happening. He gave a shrill cry of alarm as the strap drew tight, however, and Elliott jumped to his feet.

"What do you mean?" he cried. "This is an outrage! Set that man loose instantly."

He stepped forward to release the strap himself, but Carlton met him. "Don't be a fool, Elliott,"

advised the big man. "Ah! there now, you will have it!"

Elliott had tried to strike, but Carlton gripped him by the wrists like a vise. There was a brief tussle, while the missionary wriggled in the chair, but he could not free himself from that steel grasp.

"See if he's armed, Sevier," advised Carlton, coolly, and the Alabaman ran his hands over Elliott's captive person. There were no weapons.

"We don't want to hurt you, Elliott," said Sevier, "but I'm afraid we'll have to strap you up likewise to keep you from hurting yourself. Don't be frightened. There isn't going to be any bloodshed, but we've got to get the story out of that old fakir by hook or crook."

Another noose dropped over Elliott's head, pinioning his arms to his sides. He kicked Carlton on the shins, and fell with the recoil, and before he could regain his feet Carlton was sitting on his chest and Sevier was binding his ankles together. They placed him in a sitting posture against the wall, helpless as a sack.

"It's so hot that it would be cruel to gag you," added Sevier, considerately, "but if you yell we'll have to stuff a handkerchief into your mouth."

"Yes, keep your mouth shut," advised Carlton. "Get the battery, Sevier."

Sevier went into the next room and returned

218 THE TREASURE TRAIL

with a box of polished wood, about a foot in diameter, which he placed upon the table. In three more journeys he brought out the six large glass cells of an electric battery, and proceeded to twist their wires together, connecting the terminals with the wooden box.

Elliott, breathless with rage, struggling, and heat, watched these preparations from where he sat, and understood them. The missionary was to be tortured with the current from a strong induction coil. There was some relief in this knowledge, for, he thought, the effects of the current might be unpleasant, but certainly would not be dangerous, not even exactly painful.

Laurie struggled violently when they came to tie his elbows to the arms of the chair, but he was easily overpowered. The ends of the insulated wires terminated in brass strips, and they bound these upon the under side of his wrists.

"All right," said Carlton, calmly. "Turn it on."

A rapid buzzing arose from the box, and the missionary's body was agitated by a strong spasm. His shoulders heaved stifly, and his whole body strained tensely against the strap across his chest till the leather creaked. But he kept his teeth tight shut.

If the induction coil had been known to the judicial torturers of the middle ages it would cer-

tainly have been the favourite method of applying "the question." Its peculiarity is that without injuring the tissues to the slightest degree, it racks the nerves, breaks down the will, and lacerates the soul itself. But still Laurie remained silent. Under this direct attack he had evidently summoned up the courage that had made him one of the most intrepid of the pioneers of the Cross in heathendom. Sevier shut off the current.

"Are you ready to tell us now?" demanded the adventurer.

"No," said the missionary, between his teeth.

Elliott admired the old man's determination, and wondered. He realized that he had not yet seen all the sides of Laurie's peculiar personality. He tried hard to free himself without being observed, and lacerated his wrists, but could not get a shade of purchase on his bonds.

"A peg stronger this time," advised Carlton, relighting his pipe.

The contact-breaker buzzed again, and Laurie strained against the strap. His face became livid; the perspiration streamed down his cheeks, and his blue eyes were set in an anguished glare. His whole body twitched frightfully under his bonds, and his heels drummed upon the floor. Elliott looked on in impotent horror.

220 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Oh, here! I can't stand this!" said Sevier, averting his eyes.

"Shut off. Now will you talk?" said Carlton.

Laurie made no answer, but lay heavily back, his muscles still twitching. They waited; he gasped spasmodically, but did not speak.

"Again — and a little more current," commanded Carlton, and Sevier obeyed with a look of disgust. Laurie's form was torn by a terrible convulsion. His mouth opened and shut, and an inarticulate cry came from his lips. The coil buzzed for almost two minutes.

"Give him a moment," Carlton said, without emotion. "Now will you tell us? Very well; turn it on again, Sevier."

"No! no!" gasped the missionary. "I will — tell — you —"

"Good. Speak up."

Laurie lay back and breathed heavily, and with great gulps. He trembled violently in every muscle, but came slowly back to self-control.

"Are you going to tell us?" Carlton repeated.

"No! Not a word!" the missionary exclaimed, with nervous violence.

Carlton frowned. "Give him the full strength," he said, curtly.

The full strength was applied, and Laurie's body

stiffened convulsively under its force. To Elliott it seemed that the torture lasted for hours, listening to the vicious buzz of the coil and watching the writhing, white-clad form lashed in the long chair. He struggled in vain to get loose; he shut his eyes, but he could hear the creaking of the strap as Laurie's body strained against it; and at last he heard the missionary utter a stifled, choking sob — "Ah — ah — ah!"

The noise of the instrument ceased. "Now will you be sensible?" Carlton inquired.

"Yes! yes! No more, for God's sake!" Laurie moaned, and began to cry with profuse tears.

"Here, have a drink," said Sevier.

He held a full glass to the old man's lips, and he drank half a pint of whiskey and water eagerly.

"Where is it, then? What's the latitude and longitude?" Carlton insisted, eagerly. But Laurie had sunk back and closed his eyes.

"Give him time. He's worn out with your devilish machine. Cut him loose if you want him to talk," advised Elliott from the floor.

"Hello, I'd forgotten you, old man," said Sevier. "Keep cool. It's all over, and we'll turn you loose, too, in a minute."

He took Elliott's advice, however, and removed the strap. Then he stirred the missionary gently, without effect.

222 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Why, the man's asleep!" he exclaimed, bending over him in astonishment.

Laurie had, in fact, fallen instantly into a deep stupor. Carlton soaked a handkerchief in ice-water and applied it to his neck, and the old man revived.

"Give us the address, or you'll get another dose of the juice," he commanded.

The missionary winked, and seemed to gather himself together. He stood up shakily, his muscles still quivering.

"It's Ibo Island, south of the Lazarus Bank," he said. "It's latitude south twelve, forty, thirty-seven; longitude thirty-one, eleven, twenty."

Sevier noted the figures on a scrap of paper. Elliott was amazed at the statement. Had Laurie really known all along? Or was it simply an imaginary address given to save himself from further torture?

"We'll go there at once," said Carlton, "and we'll take you with us. If the stuff's there, well and good, and we'll do the handsome thing by you. If it's not there, we've got proof of crooked work against you enough to send you down for ten years' hard labour, and we'll hand you over to the English police. Be sure of your figures, if you don't want to die in prison and have your daughter disgraced."

Laurie swayed back as if he had received a blow in the face. He stared for one instant at the dark, merciless countenance of the speaker, and suddenly caught up one of the empty beer-bottles from the table and hurled it. Carlton would have been brained if he had not ducked actively, and the missile smashed on the opposite wall.

Laurie instantly seized the other bottle, and charged with a bellow of animal fury, brandishing it as a club. The attack was so astoundingly unexpected that Sevier stood stone-still.

"Keep off!" cried Carlton, dodging round the table. He picked up a long carving-knife from among the supper cutlery, and presented the point like a bayonet. "Keep off!" he commanded again. "You fool! I'll kill you!"

But Laurie lurched blindly forward, paying no heed. He seemed to thrust himself upon the blade. The breast of his white clothes reddened vividly. He dropped the bottle, stood trembling and rocking for an instant, and fell with a crash upon his back. The knife stood half-buried between his ribs. He quivered a little and lay still.

There was an appalled silence. Every man held his breath, gazing at the prostrate white figure. No one had been prepared for this.

"I never meant to do it!" murmured Carlton, in an awestruck whisper. "He ran on the blade."

224 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"See if he's dead," said Elliott, feeling very sick. Sevier knelt beside the body and lifted a wrist.

"He's done for, I'm afraid," he said, turning a pale face back to them.

"Here, let me up," Elliott demanded. "Let me see him."

They cut him loose, and Elliott examined the body. The missionary's work was done. He was dead; the knife must have touched the heart.

"This is a bad business for us all," muttered Sevier. "What'll we do with him?"

"Whatever possessed him to break out like that? It was self-defence. He ran right on the point," Carlton said, still half under his breath.

"Yes; but how'll we prove it?" Sevier rejoined.

Elliott said nothing. He looked at the dead man, at the crimson stain that was spreading over the whole coat-front, and tried to avoid thinking of Margaret. How could he tell her? Of what could he tell her — for he would have to tell her something.

Sevier poured out half a glass of whiskey and drank it neat. He stood apparently pondering for a few minutes, while all three men stood gazing with strange fascination at the corpse, which regarded the ceiling imperturbably.

"You look sick, Elliott. Take some whiskey,"

he suddenly remarked. "Wait, I'll get another glass."

He went into the adjoining room for it, and Elliott swallowed the liquor without seeing it, almost without tasting it. He had hardly drunk it when he felt a violent sickness, and sat down. The room seemed to swim and grow faint before his eyes.

"She mustn't know," he heard himself murmuring. "I can't tell her."

A numb paralysis was creeping over him. He dropped his head on the table beside the battery, and gold, love, and murder faded into blackness.

Years of oblivion seemed to pass over his head. He awoke at intervals to a sense of violent struggles, nightmares of blood and death, and a pervading, terrible nausea. Then new cycles of darkness swept down, interrupted by new dreams of agony.

He came to himself slowly, aching and sick. He was in bed, and he was being rocked gently to and fro. The room was small, with the ceiling close above his head. Light came in through a small round window, and a perpetual vibration jarred the whole place.

As his head slowly cleared, he comprehended that he must be in the stateroom of a steamer, and he imagined indistinctly that he was at sea, and on

226 THE TREASURE TRAIL

his way to Hongkong in pursuit of the mate. But there was a dull sense of catastrophe at the back of his head, and all at once he remembered. He had been at Hongkong; he had found Margaret — and the missionary, and the whole tragedy came back to him. What had happened after that? He could remember nothing, and he threw himself out of the lower berth in which he was reposing, and looked through the port light. There was nothing but ocean to be seen.

His hand went instinctively to his waist. Thank heaven! his money-belt was still there, buckled next his body, and he could feel the hard, round sovereigns through the buckskin. His clothes lay on the sofa. He hurried into them, omitting the collar, tie, and shoes, and rushed from the room, with his hair wildly dishevelled.

His room was close to the foot of the stairway, and he dashed up. He found himself on the deck of a great steamship, among dozens of well-dressed passengers who stared at him strangely. A fresh wind was blowing from a cloudy sky; the decks were wet; the ship rolled freely. Far astern there was a dark haze on the horizon, but elsewhere nothing but open water.

"For God's sake, where am I? What ship's this?" demanded Elliott distractedly from the nearest passenger.

"What's the matter? Been seasick?" answered the man, who was hanging again on the rail and smoking a pipe. He looked Elliott over with evident amusement.

But Elliott at that moment caught sight of a life buoy lashed upon the deck-house. It answered his question; it bore the black lettering:

"S. S. PERU. SAN FRANCISCO"

He tried to collect his still scattered wits, and wondered if he had landed that way while delirious.

"I have been very sick," he said to his interlocutor. "I was sick before I came aboard, and I'd even forgotten where I was. What time did we sail?"

"At daylight this morning."

"For San Francisco?"

"Of course. You must have been pretty bad. Has the ship's doctor seen you?"

"I don't know," said Elliott, weakly; and he was all at once seized with another fit of sickness and leaned over the rail, vomiting. When he had recovered a little he clung limply to a stanchion. He must get off this ship in some way; he must get back at once to Hongkong, where Margaret was left helpless.

"Have we dropped the pilot yet?" he asked of

228 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the passenger, who was looking on with the amused sympathy which is the best that seasickness can elicit.

"Dropped him three hours ago."

There was not a minute to lose. Elliott hurried down-stairs again in search of the purser's office, and burst in unceremoniously.

"What's this?" he exclaimed. "How do I come on this ship? I didn't take passage on her. I've got no ticket. I must go back to Hongkong."

"What the devil did you come aboard for, then?" inquired the purser, not unnaturally.

"I don't know how I got aboard. I woke up just now sick in my berth."

"You couldn't have got a berth without a ticket. Say, you've been seasick, haven't you? Hasn't it knocked out your memory a little? See if you haven't got a ticket about you somewhere. They haven't been taken up yet."

"Certainly I haven't!" Elliott protested, but he felt through his pockets. In the breast of his coat he came upon a large folded yellow document which, to his utter amazement, proved really to be a ticket from Victoria to San Francisco, in the name of Wingate Elliott.

"I never bought this. I never saw it before!" he cried.

"Let's see it," said the purser. "Second cabin.

It seems all correct." He rang a bell. "Ask the chief steward to come here a moment," he said to the Chinese boy who responded.

"Anyhow," Elliott insisted, "I've got to get off this ship and back to Hongkong, as quick as I can. Don't you call at Yokohama?"

"We don't stop anywhere this side of San Francisco."

The chief steward came in at this moment, and looked at Elliott with a smile of recognition. "Good morning. Feel better, sir?" he inquired.

"This gentleman doesn't know how he got on board," said the purser. "His ticket's all right. Did you see him when he came on?"

"Sure I did," responded the steward, cheerfully. "I helped to get him to his stateroom. He came aboard last night about eleven o'clock, with a couple of his friends holding him up. You sure had been having a swell time, sir, — no offence. They'd been giving you a little send-off dinner at the Hongkong Club, don't you remember? The gentlemanly dark young fellow explained it to me, and asked me to have the doctor look in on you when you woke up. How do you feel, sir?"

"Can you tell me when this ticket was bought?" Elliott asked.

The purser looked at it again. "Bought last night. It must have been the last ticket sold for

230 THE TREASURE TRAIL

this ship. You were lucky to get passage so late."

"Shanghaied, by God!" cried Elliott. "Drugged and kidnapped! I've got to see the captain. Somebody'll settle with me for this!"

"You'd better take time to put on a collar and shoes," the purser advised. "A minute more won't matter. The captain can't help you, I'm afraid."

So it appeared. The commander of the *Peru* listened sympathetically to what Elliott thought advisable to tell him, but offered no prospect of assistance.

"I don't see what we can do for you, Mr. — er — Ellis. We don't stop anywhere, and you can't expect me to put back to Hongkong."

"Couldn't you transfer me to a west-bound ship if we should meet one?"

"I'm afraid not. We carry the mails, and we're under contract not to slow down for anything but to save life. I take it that this isn't a question of saving life."

"No, but it's a question of millions. Good heavens! I stand to lose enough to buy this ship three times over."

"That may be, but I'm afraid I can't act on it. Cheer up. Things will turn out better than you

think. You'll find the *Peru* a pleasant place for a vacation."

"Is there any way for me to send a message back to Victoria?"

"Not that I know. Or, I'll tell you what I'll do. If we run close enough to anything bound for Hongkong to signal her, I'll give you a chance to throw a bottle overboard with a letter in it. That's the best I can do for you, and I can't slow down to do that."

Elliott chafed with wrath as he left the cabin of the captain, who regarded him with an interest that was obviously unmingled with much credulity. And yet he was obliged to admit that his story was incredible on the face of it, and not helped out by his own haggard and incoherent manner.

He sat down beside the rail, still feeling weak and ill, and yet too angry to care how he felt. Carlton and Sevier had played him a clever trick, almost a stroke of genius. They had put him comfortably out of the way for three weeks, to be landed on the other side of the world, while they sailed away to recover the wrecked treasure, and to escape the investigation when the missionary's murder should be discovered. With a start of from three weeks to a month they could reasonably hope to have time to plunder the *Clara McClay* without interruption.

232 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Still, as Elliott grew cooler, he could not attach much importance to the directions given by Laurie. He still felt convinced that the missionary had known no more than himself. He had made a false confession under the strain of the torture, and his desperation at the prospect of going to the Mozambique Channel clearly indicated its falsity.

But it was of Margaret that he thought, and his heart was wrung. He pictured her waiting all night for her father's return and for himself. Perhaps she was waiting still, in such an agony of alarm as he dared not imagine, while the body of the missionary was probably floating in the harbour at the foot of the Chinese city. She had no money. She knew no one in Victoria.

Elliott jumped up and paced the deck feverishly. Surely something could be done. China was almost out of sight in the southwest, and he would have given his left hand to have been able to reach that bluish line that was falling away at fifteen knots an hour. And yet, what could he do? He was at sea for almost three weeks.

There was the hope that he might be able to send a message back to Victoria, and he went to the saloon at once to write it, in case an opportunity should present itself. But it was hard to decide what to say. He did not know whether she had learned of her father's death, but judged it un-

likely. Carlton and Sevier must have disposed of the body so that it would not be found for some time. But above all things, Margaret must leave Victoria at once.

"Your father is seriously ill," he wrote at last. "He is with me. We got aboard this ship by a mistake which I will explain when I see you, and we are bound for San Francisco. You must follow us at once. Take the next steamer. If you will call on the American consul and give him the enclosure, he will arrange for your passage. Don't delay a day.

"WINGATE ELLIOTT.

"On board S. S. *Peru*."

With the letter he enclosed a note to the American consul begging him to furnish Miss Laurie with such money as she might require, and enclosing a promissory note for a hundred dollars. He then obtained an empty beer-bottle from the smoking-room steward and corked up this correspondence tightly, along with a sovereign to reward the finders.

The opportunity came late that afternoon. The *Peru* passed a British three-master booming down a fair wind toward the China coast, and the captain was as good as his word. After an exchange of

234 THE TREASURE TRAIL

signals, the Britisher lowered a boat, and the *Per* even deviated a little from her course to approach it. Elliott cut a life-buoy from the rigging, tied his bottle fast to it and cast it overboard.

The big liner tore past the boat like a locomotive tossing it high on the wash of her passage. Elliott had not before realized her speed. He ran to the stern, and saw the boatmen fish the precious float from the water.

"You'll have to pay for that life-belt, you know," said the second officer, at his shoulder. "You wouldn't have got it if I'd seen you in time."

Elliott had to pay for more than the life-belt. He had nothing with him but the clothes he stood in, and he was obliged to purchase a clean shirt, fresh collars, handkerchiefs, — a dozen small articles, — from the stewards, paying sea prices, which differ from land prices according to the needs of the purchaser. Elliott's need was great, and he felt almost grateful to his kidnappers for having left him his money-belt. He felt certain that it was to Sevier that he owed that.

He was seasick most of the time during the first four days of the voyage, for the first time in his life — the result, he supposed, of the potent drug that Sevier had administered. After that, he rallied, and began to be conscious of the bracing

effect of the cool ocean breezes after hot Hongkong. But never did a voyage pass so slowly. He had been impatient in going to Bombay; he had fretted between Bombay and Hongkong, but now he walked the deck almost incessantly, and was always the first to look at the daily record of the ship's run posted at noon in the saloon. He had never sailed the Pacific before, nor imagined that it was so wide.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CLUE FOUND

BUT twenty days cannot stretch to infinity, even at sea. The *Peru* entered the Golden Gate early in the forenoon on the 9th of August, and Elliott, having no baggage to worry him, hurried at once to the offices of the Eastern Mail Steamship Company.

He waited anxiously while a youthful clerk flipped over the letters and telegrams in the rack, but English honesty was vindicated. There were two brown cable messages for him, and he ripped them open nervously. The first was from Henninger. It had been forwarded from Hongkong, and read:

"Will search. Come Zanzibar immediately."

This was not what he wanted, but the second proved to be from Margaret, saying:

"Sailing twenty-eighth, steamer *Imperial*."

Elliott felt as if a mighty weight had been heaved off his breast. Margaret must be then at sea, but her passage would be longer than his own.

The ships of the Imperial line called at Yokohama and Honolulu, and on investigation he learned that the steamer *Imperial* was not due at San Francisco until the last day of August. He had nearly three weeks to wait, but of course he would wait for her. The treasure was a secondary issue just then, and then the question arose of how he was to meet her with the word of her father's death.

For the actual fact he could feel but little regret. Laurie was not a man for this world; he was too high, or too low, as one pleased to regard it; and as a guardian for his daughter he was totally worthless. Sooner or later open disgrace was certain, and the grief would have been worse to Margaret than her father's death. It was better that he had died when he did, with his halo untarnished — to his daughter's eyes at least.

Elliott spent the next days in feverish unrest. He had nothing to do, and could not have done it if he had, and he half-longed for Margaret's coming and half-dreaded it. He would have to tell her the whole story of the treasure and of the murder. How would she receive it? And would it, or would it not be taking an unfair advantage of her helplessness to tell her that he loved her and wished nothing so much as to protect her for the rest of her life?

He was rapidly becoming worn out by these

238 THE TREASURE TRAIL

plans, doubts, and problems, and half-poisoned with the number of secrets and difficulties which he had to keep locked up in his own breast, when a sudden recollection came to him with relief. Bennett was in the city.

Or, at least, he should be here. According to the arrangement he was to go to San Francisco as soon as he could leave the hospital in St. Louis, and surely his broken bones must have mended long ago. He was to have wired his address to Henninger, and probably he had done so, but Henninger was far away, and the fact would not help Elliott to find his former travelling companion.

He dropped a note to Bennett, however, in the city general delivery, and also wrote to him in care of the hospital, on the chance that the letter would be forwarded. Two days passed; it was evident that the former letter had not reached him, and it would be necessary to wait till an answer could arrive from St. Louis.

Elliott waited, feeling that he had merely added another uncertainty to his already plentiful store of them. He waited for ten days, and then as he entered the lobby of his hotel he saw a man leaning over the desk to speak to the clerk, and his back looked somehow familiar.

Elliott stepped up to the man, and touched his shoulder.

"Bennett! Is this you?"

The man turned with a start. It was indeed the adventurer, but dressed in a style indicating almost unrecognizable prosperity. He stared at Elliott for a moment, and then gripped him with both hands, emitting an explosively inarticulate ejaculation.

"By thunder!" he cried. "I couldn't place you. I never saw you in a boiled shirt before. Let's get out of this. I never was so glad to see a man in my life."

He stepped out of the line and they left the hotel. As soon as they were in the street he clutched Elliott's arm.

"Have you got it?" he demanded, under his breath.

Elliott laughed a little wearily. "No, we haven't got it. I've given up thinking that we ever will, though Henninger has just wired me that he's going to search the whole Mozambique Channel."

"Isn't Henninger with you?"

"No, he's in Zanzibar, and the other fellows are strung out all along the East Africa coast. It's a long story, and there's not much comfort in it, but let's go over to the park and I'll tell you."

"Start it as we walk along. Man, I've been

240 THE TREASURE TRAIL.

hungering and thirsting for some . . . from that job."

So on the street Elliott began the story, of the great game in Nashville that had financed the expedition, of the voyages of the party, and of his own adventures on the train in Bombay and Hong Kong. He finished it on a park bench, with the telling of the missionary, and the high-class form of "shanghaing," of which he had himself been the victim. Of Margaret he judged it best to say nothing.

Bennett listened feverishly, interrupting the story with impatient questions. When Elliott had finished he sat in meditation for a couple of minutes.

"Henninger is right," he pronounced at last. "The only thing now is to search. Are you sure the address your old missionary gave was a fake?"

"I can't believe it was anything else. He would he have risked killing me if it was tested?"

"It looks so. His direction was somewhere near the right spot, though; looking at maps. Anyhow, I'll know the way again when I see it."

"The wreck will mark it, won't it?"

"The wreck is probably broken up, and sunk

out of sight by this time. That's a point in our favor for the worst danger is from the coast pirates and Arab riffraff. Let's start right away for the bar, by the next steamer."

"I can't leave for a week—so," Elliott confessed, as he explained his reasons for delay.

"You're bringing a lot of women in this thing. This is a risky game," commented Bennett.

"I can't be in it. But I wired her and I've got to meet her. Why, I'll see her rather than live and here with me."

"I suppose you've got to wait," said Bennett, and was silent for several seconds. "But, damn it! this is awful!" he exploded, suddenly. "Every minute counts. Her ship'll be waiting for us. That other gang must be half-way there now, and when they don't find the wreck on the island they'll look somewhere else. They've got three weeks' start of us, with ten thousand miles less to go."

"They won't find anything," Elliott attempted, soothingly.

"How do you know they won't? They've got as good a chance as we, haven't they? Better, by thunder! Besides, there are all sorts of Arab and Berber craft sailing up and down the channel. It seems to me you've done nothing all through but waste time."

242 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"If you're not satisfied with my ways, you'd better go and join Henninger by yourself," said Elliott, growing irritated. "You can count me out of it. I'm staying here for the present."

Bennett looked for a moment as if inclined to take Elliott at his word, and then his face relaxed and he began to laugh.

"Don't be an idiot, you old jay!" he exclaimed, finally. "Of course I'll wait for you. You waited for me in St. Louis, didn't you? Only — well, I've been waiting now for four months, and it's getting on my nerves."

"Have you been here all that time?"

"Oh, no. The first month I spent in the hospital, where you had the pleasure of seeing me wrapped in splints. But as soon as I got out I made a bee-line for the Pacific coast. I left a forwarding address at the hospital, and I expected to have you fellows wire me. I've written to every point I could think of to catch some of you."

"Got any money?"

"You bet I have. I got — what do you think? — eight hundred dollars out of the railroad for my wounds and bruises. I asked for two thousand and got eight hundred. I had to give half of it to my lawyer, though," he added, regretfully. "Then, a couple of weeks ago, a fellow put me on to a good thing at the race-track out here. It was at five to

one. I plunged a hundred on it, and she staggered home by a nose. He's going to give me another good tip on Saturday — get-away day, you know, and a long shot."

"Don't you touch it," said Elliott. "We'll need all your spare cash. I've got none too much myself, and we've got a long way to go."

The prospect of all the weary miles of sea and land that he must still travel on the treasure hunt, in fact, had come to oppress him. He had already all but encircled the globe, and he sickened at the thought of another month-long voyage. He was tired, mortally tired, of stewards, and saloon tables, and smoking-rooms, and he told himself that if he ever found himself once more in some silent, sunshiny American village he would contentedly vegetate there like a plant for the rest of his days.

But before that he would have to think of how to meet Margaret, who would be there in a week, and of some words to prepare her for the final explanation. This week passed as swiftly as the two first had slowly. He spent it in lounging about uneasily, and in long conferences with Bennett, and on the afternoon of the twenty-ninth he heard that the *Imperial* had been sighted. She was, in fact, then entering the harbour.

But he was still without a speech prepared when the gangplank was opened, and the flood of pas-

244 THE TREASURE TRAIL

sengers began to pour down. He saw Margaret, and waved his hand, but even from a distance he was shocked at her pallor, and startled by the fact that she was wearing complete black. He waited for her outside the customs enclosure.

"You see I've come. I hoped you would meet me," she said.

"Of course I would meet you," he protested, unsteadily, reading the expected inquiry for her father. On a nearer view her face was even more drawn and haggard than he had thought; she looked as if she had not slept for a week, but she had met him with a brave smile.

"I know all about it," she added.

"All? What?" stammered Elliott.

"Everything. They found my father's body the day after I got your letter. It was in an empty house. I saw him buried in Happy Valley."

"Margaret, I didn't know how to tell you. I didn't dare —"

"Oh, yes, I know; it was kind of you. And oh! I was so glad to get away from that awful city. But for your letter I think I should have died. I thought at first that you had deserted us, and I was all alone. That night of waiting — can I ever forget it! The consul and his wife were very kind — but I was all alone." Her voice was

choking, and she was trying hard to keep the sobs down.

"Don't cry, for heaven's sake, — dear," said Elliott, in deep trouble. "The worst is over now. I'll see that everything is right. Just depend on me."

"I suppose the worst is over," she said, drying her eyes. "But I feel as if it were only beginning. How can I live? My whole life feels at an end, somehow. But I will try to be strong. I was brave in Hongkong, when I had everything to do — but now. Never mind, I will be brave again, as my poor father was, and as he would want me to be."

"That's right. Here's your hotel. There's a good room engaged for you, and you'll find they'll make you very comfortable. Ask for everything you want," said Elliott.

"You must tell me first all you know about father's death."

Elliott shuddered. "Not to-day. You're tired out; you must be. I'll tell you to-morrow."

"No. Now — at once," she said, impatiently. "I can't sleep till I know it all. Then I'll never ask you to speak of it again."

Elliott, thus cornered, told her somewhat baldly the story of how the missionary had been decoyed to the house on the slope of the mountain, and how

246 THE TREASURE TRAIL

he had met his death. He touched lightly on the torture, and said nothing of the treasure. The latter was too long a story.

"They stabbed him because he would not tell them something that they believed he knew. In reality he knew nothing of it. I think it was really by accident that he was wounded. I do not believe that they intended to do more than frighten him."

"And you saw it all?"

"I was lying tied hand and foot on the floor. They drugged me afterward and put me on a ship for San Francisco."

"What was it that they wanted him to tell them?"

"It was a business matter," Elliott said, hastily. "Something that he knew nothing about, but they thought he did. I don't quite understand the details of it myself."

He had feared a terrible scene, but Margaret took the story courageously.

"What became of the — the murderers?" she asked, after a silence.

"I have no idea. Did you hear of any one being arrested?"

"No. There was an inquest — but no one arrested, at least before I left." She was twisting her handkerchief into shreds between her fingers. "Thank you," she said, suddenly, trying to smile

again. "It was kind of you to tell me. You have been so good to me! Now — now, please go!"

Elliott fled from the hotel, immeasurably relieved that it was over. The next day, he said to himself, he would send her back to her aunt in Nebraska, where she would probably wish to go, and he himself would sail with Bennett for Africa. When he returned it would be with his share of the great treasure. He felt the need of it now; he wanted it more than ever — not for his own sake, but for Margaret's.

Next morning, when he called on Margaret, she made no reference to her father. She was very pale and evidently dispirited, and he took her out driving. She attempted to talk on casual topics, but with indifferent success, and she did not speak of leaving San Francisco.

It was the same on the next day, and the next. Margaret no longer cared either to drive or to walk. She received Elliott in her sitting-room at the hotel when he came to see her. She was listless, languid, paler than ever. As she was, in a manner, his guest, he could not well suggest to her that she return to Lincoln, but he saw clearly that she would be ill unless she were given a change of scene, and something to divert her mind. San Francisco still was too suggestive of Hong-kong, and he noticed that she shrunk painfully

248 THE TREASURE TRAIL

from the sight of a Chinaman. She must leave the city, he thought; but perhaps she did not have even enough money for her ticket to Lincoln.

After long pondering, he broached the matter on the fourth day.

"If you'd like to go back to your aunt at Lincoln, Margaret," he said, "I know a fellow here in the Union Pacific office, and I can get you transportation without its costing you a cent."

"Don't you know?" she answered. "My aunt is dead. She died shortly after you left Lincoln. She was caught out in that storm that found us at Salt Lake—do you remember it?—and took cold, and died of pneumonia. I have no one in the world now. That was the chief reason why I went to Hongkong."

"No, you never told me that," said Elliott, startled, and worried. He would have liked to say what he felt that, under the circumstances, he had no right to say; he had trouble to restrain it; he wanted to relieve her at once from all her material troubles.

"And this brings me to what I should have said long ago," she went on. "I am—it's humiliating to confess it—but I have no money. All I had I spent in Hongkong. I want to get work here. I'm strong; I can do anything. Have you any idea where I could try?"

Elliott started with horror; the confession wrenched his heart. But it occurred to him that he could subsidize some one to take music lessons from her.

"Why, yes," he said. "I'm glad you spoke of it. I know one girl here, at least, who wants music lessons. She'll pay well for them, too — four or five dollars an hour."

"Oh!" gasped Margaret. "Do they pay such prices in California? But they will want something extraordinary."

"No, you'll do splendidly," Elliott assured her. "Then I have to go away myself, — on that hunt for the easy millions I spoke of in Hongkong."

"And you never told me just what it was," said Margaret. "But, before you go, I want you to tell me just what it was that those men wanted my father to tell them."

Elliott reflected. "Yes, I might as well tell you," he said, slowly. "It is mixed up with my own venture, too. I cut the story short the other day, for fear of hurting you too much." And for the third time Elliott told the story of the wrecked gold-ship, and of his own efforts in the chase.

"They killed him because he would not tell where the wreck was?" she soliloquized, when he had finished.

250 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"He could not tell them what he knew nothing of."

"But my father did know where that ship was wrecked," she said, looking him full in the face.

"What? Impossible!" cried Elliott, staggered.

"He knew where it was wrecked. That man who was in the boat with him — the mate — told him before he died, and gave him the exact position, with the latitude and longitude. My father told me of it. He had planned to go there sometime and see if anything could be recovered from the wreck. I found the map, with the place marked, among his papers. But he thought that no one else knew of it."

Elliott, still half-dazed, reflected that the missionary had not ceased to astonish him, even after death.

"He intended to give you a share of it. Do you remember that I once said that he might be able to do something great for you?"

"Well, in that case," said Elliott, trying to focus this new aspect of events, "did he tell those fellows the right place? If he did, it's too late to look."

"Did he tell them anything?"

"He said the wreck was on Ibo Island, latitude and longitude something. I supposed that he said it merely to save himself — the first place he could

think of. Do you remember where the exact spot was?"

"No. But I have the map in my trunk."

"Would you mind getting it? Of course," he added, "you'll have an equal share in whatever we get out of it. But if you really know the right spot there isn't a minute to lose."

She sat without moving, however. "Come and see me this afternoon," she said, finally. "I want to think it over."

Elliott was astonished at this request. Surely she could not distrust him, though unquestionably it was her secret. He reflected dubiously that there is never any knowing what a woman will decide to do with a delicate case.

"You said that one of your friends — one of your partners — was in the city," she said, as he left. "Please bring him with you this afternoon. I think it would be right."

More bewildered than ever, Elliott went away to find Bennett, who was able to throw no light on his perplexity. But they returned together to the hotel at three o'clock, where Margaret received them with a manner which was more animated than in the forenoon.

"This is the map," she said, holding up a folded piece of paper, spotted and stained. "I have just

252 THE TREASURE TRAIL

been looking at it again. What place did you say my father told them?"

"Ibo Island, latitude south twelve, forty something. I forget the longitude," replied Elliott. "Do you think that's it?"

She consulted the map again.

"No. It isn't Ibo Island, and it isn't latitude twelve, forty, at all. It's nearly a hundred miles south of that, I should think. It must be nearly two hundred miles from Ibo Island."

"I thought he wasn't telling the truth," said Elliott, tactlessly.

"No," the girl flashed back. "He died with an untruth on his lips for my sake. He thought I might still profit by this gold. Tell me," she went on, after a nervous pause, "have those other men any right to it?"

"No more than we have."

"Does the treasure belong to any one? I mean, will it be defrauding any one if we take it?"

"Apparently not. It's treasure-trove. But where is it?"

She folded the map and stowed it inside her blouse. "I'll take you to it," she said.

"You?" exclaimed Elliott. "You couldn't."

"You can't find it without my help, it seems. I will give you this map when our boat is out of

sight of land—the boat in which we go to find the wreck. You will have to take me with you.”

Bennett looked closely at the girl, and smiled quietly.

“But, great heavens! you don’t know what you’re asking,” cried Elliott. “You don’t know what sort of a rough crew we’ll ship. It may come to fighting.”

“I’m not afraid. And you know I can shoot.”

“It’s simply out of the question,” Elliott said, decisively. “You must stay here or go back to Lincoln. You’ll give us the map, and we’ll bring back your share for you. You can trust us, I hope?”

“It isn’t that I’m afraid. But I have no friends now nor money. No one knows anything of me; what does it matter what I do? And I can’t stay here. I think I should die if I had to stay in San Francisco. I must do something—I don’t care what. Oh, set it down as a girl’s foolish freak—anything you like!” she exclaimed, passionately. “But I go with your expedition, or it goes without the map.”

Elliott looked helplessly at Bennett, who said nothing. Then a new idea struck him.

“But we’re too late anyhow. Those other fellows have a month’s start, and they will certainly

254 THE TREASURE TRAIL

search all the islands within two or three hundred miles."

"I was thinking of that," said Bennett. "I don't see why Miss Laurie shouldn't go with us if she's determined to do it. But the time? Let's figure it out."

"I'm afraid it's hopeless," said Elliott. "It's three weeks from here to Hongkong."

"Well, let's see. Suppose they sailed within a day or two after you did. It's about two weeks to Bombay. They'll have trouble in getting a steamer for the East African coast, because there isn't any regular service. They're certain to be delayed there for ten days or two weeks, and when they do sail it will be on a slow ship, because there isn't any thing else in those waters. It'll take them over a month to get to Zanzibar."

"They may be there by this time, then," remarked Elliott.

"Well, suppose they are. It'll take them nearly a month to fit out their expedition, hire a vessel, get a crew, divers and diving-suits, and they'll be three or four days in sailing to Ibo Island. They'll spend a day or two there, and then they'll begin to look elsewhere. If the right place is over two hundred miles away, it'll take them two or three weeks to get to it. They can't reasonably get to the

Clara McClay in less than six to seven weeks from to-day."

"But it will take us the same six or seven weeks to get there, not speaking of the distance from here to Hongkong," Elliott objected.

"Yes, if we go that way. But rail travel is quicker than land, and we're only five days from New York."

"By Jove! I see," cried Elliott, catching the idea.

"New York to London is seven days, if we make the right connections. London to Durban is about seventeen days, isn't it? It'll take a few more days to get to Delagoa Bay, and say another week to sail up the channel to the wreck. Total about five weeks. It gives us a margin of about one week. I'll wire Henninger at once to get his outfit ready at Delagoa Bay, and we'll sail the moment we get there."

"There's just a chance, I believe," exclaimed Elliott. "But why not start our expedition from Zanzibar? It's nearer."

"So it is, and that's why Sevier will choose it. We don't want to meet him there or anywhere else."

"Suppose we meet his gang at the wreck?"

"We must beat them out."

"Yes, there's a chance—a fighting chance,

256 THE TREASURE TRAIL

after all," said Elliott, getting up and beginning to walk about restlessly. "That is, if Miss Laurie will be reasonable," looking at her imploringly.

"I am perfectly reasonable."

"You'll give us the steering directions, then?"

"Not till we are on board, at Delagoa Bay. Come, we'll argue the question as we go. There's no time to lose now. Can we get a train to-night?"

"The Overland leaves at seven o'clock," said Bennett. "It's as she says. There's no time to talk. We've got just the narrowest margin now, and our only chance is in knowing exactly where to go when we sail from Airica."

"I'll be ready at six," said Margaret, decisively. "We'll talk it all over on the train."

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CHAPTER XV.

THE OTHER WAY ROUND THE WORLD

BEFORE the train left Elliott cabled again to Henninger, this time using the usual code for abbreviation's sake:

"Found what we wanted. Am coming with Bennett. Have expedition ready at Delagoa Bay, not Zanzibar. Buy arms. Wire American Line, New York."

He also telegraphed to New York for berths on the Southampton steamer sailing on the eighth day from that time. He reserved three berths, though he was resolved that only two should be used. "She may as well come on to Chicago," he reflected, "or even to New York. The East is a better place than the West to leave her." But somewhere on the cross-continent journey he intended to convince her of the folly of her resolution.

But somehow he did not feel equal to the endeavour at present, so he established Margaret comfortably in a chair car, and went to smoke with Bennett.

258 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"This is a nice state of things," he said, biting a cigar irritably in two. "Why didn't you back me up? I thought you were against having women in a man's game."

"So I am," replied Bennett, who did not appear dissatisfied. "But I never argue with a woman when she's made up her mind. Give her time and she'll change it herself. Miss Laurie will give us the map all right, and if she won't —"

"Then she'll have to go with us."

"No. We can take it."

"Take it? Do you mean by force?"

"Yes, if necessary. Of course we'll give her a square divvy."

"By heavens, Bennett!" said Elliott, "if you ever try to lay a hand on that girl I'll shoot you. Yes, I will. So there's your plan of robbing her, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. That map's her own, and I'm here to see that she does as she likes with it."

"All right; have it your own way," said Bennett, easily. "I don't care a twopenny hang if she does sail with us. She seems to be a sensible sort of girl who wouldn't bother. It was you who kicked about it."

"I know it was, and you'll see that I'll convince her yet," replied Elliott, gloomily. After a long

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 259

pause, "What do you think of her?" he demanded, almost uncontrollably.

"Oh, I don't know," responded Bennett, between puffs. "Regular Western type, isn't she? Sensible, nice girl, I guess. I didn't see much in her."

Elliott stared in amazement at such lack of penetration, threw down his cigar, and went back to the car where Margaret was settled with a heap of magazines, which she was not reading. Bennett meanwhile smiled thoughtfully at the approaching foot-hills with the air of a man for whom life has no more surprises.

There was plenty of time now to argue the question of Margaret's accompanying the expedition, and Elliott argued it. The girl did little more than listen, sometimes smiling at the floods of polemic that were poured upon her all the way across the foot-hills, through the gorges and tunnels and trestles of the mountains, and down the slope to the desert. She would listen, but she would not discuss. She would talk of any other subject but that one. It seemed to Elliott's watchful eye, however, that she was becoming a little more cheerful, that she was beginning to recuperate a little from the terrible strain of her experiences, and he said, mentally, that it was perhaps a good thing, after all, that she should go as far as New York.

Bennett absolutely refused to assist him, and

260 THE TREASURE TRAIL

remained for the most part in the smoking-car while the train skated down the eastern slope and roared out upon the great desert. At Ogden Elliott noted with satisfaction that they were maintaining schedule time. At Denver they were only an hour late. The country was becoming level, so that there were no topographical obstacles to speed.

"This is my country!" exclaimed Margaret. She was watching the gray-green rolling plain slowly revolve upon the middle distance. A couple of horsemen in wide hats and chaparejos were loping across it half a mile away. "How I should like to get off, get a horse, and just tear across those plains!"

"Do it, for goodness' sake," said Elliott. "We'll be in Kansas City to-morrow, and you can wait there or in Lincoln till we come back with your share of the plunder."

"No, I've something else to think of. Are we going to catch the steamer, do you think?"

"You are not," Elliott retorted.

She smiled rather wearily, trying to see the cow-punchers, who were out of sight.

"How on earth can I convince you of your foolishness? You seem to have no idea of the rough sort of a trip it will be, nor the gang of cutthroats we may ship for a crew. Why, you don't even know what sort of men my partners are."

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 261

"I suppose they're like you and Mr. Bennett. I'm not afraid of them, nor of anything else."

"But can't you trust us — can't you trust me? — to look after your interests?"

"You know it isn't that," cried Margaret. "It's unkind of you to put it that way. Oh, don't harass me!" she appealed. "I am wretched enough as it is. Don't you see that I have to do something to keep myself from thinking?"

Against such an argument a man is always defenceless, and Elliott abandoned the attack, baffled again. But he was not the less determined that she should not leave America, and he reserved himself for a final struggle at New York.

They arrived at Omaha on Thursday night, and on the following morning they were in Chicago. They had just thirty-five minutes for a hurried breakfast and a brief walk up and down the vast, smoky platform before they left for Buffalo. It was almost the last stage of the land journey.

"We'll make it without a hitch," said Bennett, cheerfully. "This is better than the way I raced across the continent before on this job. Do you remember that?"

But they missed connections at Buffalo for the first time on the transcontinental journey, and were obliged to wait for several hours for the New York express. But Buffalo was left behind that

262 THE TREASURE TRAIL

night, and on the next morning they arrived at Jersey City, and crossed the ferry. New York harbour, sparkling in the mild September sunshine, seemed to congratulate them. It was Sunday morning, and there was plenty of time, for the *St. Paul* did not sail till Monday noon.

Margaret went to a quiet, but expensive hotel, which Elliott selected for her, while he lodged himself with Bennett at the same house where the party had made rendezvous with Sullivan four months ago. The place looked the same as ever, and it was hard to realize that he had circled the globe since that time, and it was not pleasant to remember that he did not seem to be appreciably nearer the lost treasure. However, they had a definite clue at last, — or, rather, Margaret had one. It was now only a question of time, and of obtaining this clue from its possessor, who must go no further eastward.

At the offices of the American Line, Elliott found a cablegram from Henninger awaiting him. It read:

“Wire directions. Dangerous to wait.”

Elliott showed this message to Margaret. “This settles it, you see,” he said. “Henninger probably has his expedition all ready to sail, and we’ll all have to stay here till the work is done.”

“Are you going to stay, too?” she interrogated.

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 263

"Well," Elliott hesitated, having no such intention. "I guess Bennett and I will go on, though I don't expect we can get there in time to join the boys before they sail. But you'll stay here, of course. Would you rather stay in New York, or go into the country?"

"I'm going to South Africa," remarked Margaret, looking out the window.

"You've gone just as far as you are going."

"I haven't. You need me. Now, don't rehearse all your arguments to me; I've heard them all, and they're all sound. But I know the one you are thinking of, but daren't mention — that it would be unladylike and not respectable for me to go."

Elliott laughed. "I must confess that that argument hadn't entered my mind."

"Then I'm not going to give up what I want to do, just because I happen to be a girl. I expect I'd be as useful as any one of your party. I'm strong; and I can outride you and outshoot you, as you know very well. Do you think I care what any one will say? Nobody in the world takes interest in me enough to say anything. Do you want me to remind myself again that I have no money? I've been living on you; I know it. But I can endure that because I shall soon be able to pay back every cent, but I'm not going to sit here and wait till you come back from your adventures and give

264 THE TREASURE TRAIL

me what you think my secret is worth. I'm going to share in it all, whatever comes — fortune or fighting. There's nobody in the world now who cares whether I live or die, or — what's more important, I suppose — whether I'm ladylike or not."

"How about me?" said Elliott. He hesitated, and then plunged desperately ahead. "Margaret, you've said that before, and I can't stand your feeling like that. Look here, I may as well tell you now: all that gold is nothing to me in comparison with your unhappiness or danger. Let me look after you and think of you; you'll find me better than nobody. I'm asking you to marry me, Margaret."

He felt at once conscious of having blundered, but it was too late.

"Oh, how dare you!" she flashed. She jumped up, and stood vibrating in every nerve. "Do you think that I would marry you because you pity me? Perhaps you thought that I was trying to work on your feelings, so that you had to say that to me! Don't be afraid; I'm not going to accept you. I'm not going to South Africa merely to be in your society. I suppose you thought that! How ~~dared~~ you?"

She sank down on the sofa again and burst into passionate sobbing, with her face buried in the cushions.

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 265

"Margaret —" ventured Elliott, approaching her.

"Go away!" she cried, lifting a face in which the eyes still blazed behind the tears. "I will go with you — I will — now more than ever — but I'll never speak to you!"

Elliott went away as he was ordered, sore and angry at Margaret, at himself. He could not understand how she could so have misconceived him. He felt almost disposed to let her go her own way and take her own chances; and yet he felt that he must be always at her side to see that she suffered nothing. He walked over to Broadway, inwardly fuming, and stopped at a cable agency, where he sent another message to Henninger:

"Can't wire clue. Am bringing it. Be ready at Delagoa."

He had considerable trepidation in calling for Margaret the next morning, but he found her cold and calm. Her pallor had returned, and she looked as if she had not slept.

"Are you still determined to go?" he asked.

"Certainly."

"It's time to go, then. The ship sails at noon. There's a cab down-stairs for you."

Her valise was already packed and strapped; so was her small steamer trunk, and she had nothing to do but put on her hat. She had been expecting

266 THE TREASURE TRAIL

him, and in half an hour they were on board the great liner, and had been shown their stateroom. Bennett was waiting for them at the wharf, and the big ship swung majestically from her mooring and moved down the bay, past the rugged sierran skyline of brick and granite that had stimulated Elliott's fancy when he last sailed from the port on the apparently endless trail of gold.

During the first half of the voyage he did not find Margaret conversational; she appeared to endure his presence with bare patience. She had plenty of other society on board, but neither did she seem to care much for the men who tried to scrape acquaintance with her with the relaxed etiquette of travel. She appeared to take a fancy for Bennett, however, and spent hours in long talks with him when she was not reading or gazing meditatively from her deck-chair across the dark, unstable sea.

Elliott perceived that he had done wrong, but he did not see how to remedy it. He had indeed been tactless and brutal; he had, or it looked as if he had, tried to force himself upon her while she was virtually his guest. Still, he thought that she might have misunderstood him less violently; and while he admitted that he had been served rightfully, he felt aggrieved that he had not been served more mercifully. However, since she appeared

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 267

have no taste for his conversation, he was prepared, for the present, to dispose of it elsewhere.

But she called him to her that afternoon on deck, and pointed to an unoccupied chair beside her own. He sat down and looked at her with an expression that he tried to make severe, but which failed in the face of her smile.

"Don't you think it's very absurd for fellow passengers not to be friends?" she asked.

"Very," he replied, a little stiffly.

"Come, you see I'm making the advances. You were rude and unkind to me, and you haven't apologized as you should. Are you sorry?"

"In one way — yes."

She made a little face. "That's not good enough. But I'll let you off. I'll forget what you said, on condition that you make no more objection to my going where I please. Is it a bargain?"

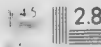
"I suppose so — for my objections have no effect anyway."

"Not a bit. They only spoil everything. Don't you understand," she went on, earnestly, "that I *had* to do this? If I had stayed at home, or wherever I tried to make a home, I would have died; I would have gone mad with loneliness and trouble. You don't know what I have suffered. Perhaps you think I am forgetting it, but it follows me night and day. I daren't think of it, or speak of



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268 THE TREASURE TRAIL

it. I have to do something — anything. Don't you understand?"

"Perhaps not altogether. But you shall go where you like, without let or hindrance," said Elliott, gravely.

"We're friends again, then?"

"I think so."

"Ah, but you must be sure," she insisted.

"Well, then, I am sure," he said, laughingly; though in his heart he felt no such certainty. But he saw clearly that friendship would have to do till the treasure-hunt were finished. On that expedition they were comrades and fellow adventurers, and nothing more.

During the remainder of the passage he therefore endeavoured to return as far as possible to the easy spirit of the Hongkong days, though Hongkong was a place of which neither cared to speak. Margaret appeared to welcome this regained camaraderie, and her spirits seemed to grow brighter than at her landing in America. They talked of many things, but they avoided the subject of the treasure-ship; that was dangerous to touch; it was too near their hearts. Yet in the intervals of silence there was an image upon Elliott's inward eye, an image that came to be almost permanent, of another steamer, this one ploughing through the heated blue of the Indian Ocean, and of two men

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 269

leaning over her bow, with their faces and thoughts running forward to the same spot as his own. The same sort of vision must have presented itself to Margaret, for she once, though only once, exclaimed:

"Do you think we'll be in time?"

"I don't know. It would have been safer if you had let us cable the directions. For the last couple of weeks, I've somehow felt that the game was up," responded Elliott.

"It's not!" she cried. "I know it. We will be in time. We must."

"Well, we're doing all we can," said Elliott. "We're due to reach Southampton to-morrow at ten in the forenoon, and the Cape Town steamer sails the next day at noon. We're cutting it pretty fine."

The *St. Paul* arrived punctually at her dock, and her passengers scattered, most of them taking the steamer special train for London. Elliott saw Margaret established in a comfortable hotel for the day and night, and went down to the steamer offices with Bennett to see if by chance there was any telegram. There was one, and Elliott ripped it open:

"For God's sake," it read, "wire clue immediately. Other party at Zanzibar. Can't wait.

"HENNINGER."

270 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Bennett read the message, and whistled low. The two men looked at each other.

"Can't you persuade her to tell us?" Bennett asked.

"No. She's determined to go."

"Well, she'll make us lose the whole thing." He reflected a moment. "We'll have to take it from her."

"I told you what I would do if you tried that," said Elliott, in an even voice. "I'll do it; you can count on me. I'm just as keen on getting that stuff as you are, but by fair play. After all, Sevier and Carlton can't be so much ahead of us, and they don't know where to look."

"I expect I'm as quick as you are, if it came to shooting," said Bennett. "But a row would spoil everything, bring in the police and all sorts of nastiness. But look there—that's what I've been looking at." He indicated a large placard bearing the sailing dates of the ships of the Union Castle Line for South Africa. "Didn't you say that our ship sailed Tuesday noon? That card says Monday noon, and that's to-day, and it's eleven-forty now."

"By Jove, that's so!" said Elliott, looking hard at the card. "The agent in New York certainly said Tuesday. Here," he called to a clerk. "Is

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 271

that sailing list right? Does the *Avon Castle* sail to-day?"

"Sails at noon sharp, sir," the clerk assured him.

Elliott exploded an ejaculation and shot out of the office. Luckily there was a cab within a few yards; luckily again, it was a four-wheeler.

"Hotel Surry, quick as you know how!" shouted Bennett, and the driver whipped up his horses. There was just eighteen minutes, and to miss the steamer would entail a delay of three or four days, when every hour was worth red gold.

"Won't you hear reason?" said Bennett. "Won't you help me to make her give up that map? Everything may depend on this minute."

"No, I won't," countered Elliott, flatly.

"You're as bad as she is. If I had Henninger here, we'd coerce you; and by Jove, you'd better think what you'll say to the boys when they hear that you've queered the whole game."

"I'll take the blame," said Elliott; though in his heart he disliked the situation almost as much as his companion did.

Fortunately Margaret had not yet unpacked anything, and Elliott brought her down the stairs with a rush, and hurried her into the cab. It was only a few hundred yards to the dock, but

272 THE TREASURE TRAIL

as they neared it they heard the gruff warning whistle of the liner.

"Oh, is it too late?" gasped Margaret, who was very pale.

The gangplank was being cleared as the party rushed down the platform; the plank was drawn ashore almost before they had reached the deck. There was another hoarse blast from the great whistle; a shout of "All clear aft!" and then the space between the wharf and the ship's side began to widen.

"Safe!" said Bennett. "It's an omen."

But Elliott pulled the crumpled telegram from his pocket where he had crammed it, and showed it to Margaret.

"I don't care," said she, still breathing hard from the race. "We will be there before them. I feel it."

"Heaven send you're right. You're taking a big responsibility," replied Elliott, gravely.

"That reminds me that we didn't have time to answer that cable," Bennett put in. "Never mind. Henninger will be wild, but we had nothing to say."

It is a long way from Southampton to Cape Town, even when one is not in a hurry. But when life and death, or money, which in modern life is the same thing, hangs upon the ship's speed, the length of the passage is doubled and tripled, for

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 273

the ordinary pastimes of sea life become impossible. Shuffleboard is frivolous; books are impertinent, and there is no interest in passing ships or monsters of the deep. The three adventurers hung together, talking little, but mutely sharing the strain of uncertainty. Late one night in the second week, Elliott suddenly proposed poker to Bennett.

"Big stakes," he said, "payable from our profits later? It'll kill the cursed time."

But Bennett shook his head. "I've just sense enough left to keep away from gambling now. If we started we wouldn't stop till we'd won or lost every cent we'll ever have."

Elliott acquiesced moodily. The strain was wearing on his nerves, and he went out of the smoking-room and walked along the deserted deck. It was a brilliant blue night; the stars overhead blazed like torches, and the dark line of the foremast plunged through the Southern Cross as the bows rose and fell. The steamer shook with the pulsations of the screws, and the water foamed and thundered back upon her sides, but to Elliott she seemed barely to crawl. It occurred to him that the treasure must be then almost directly east of him, on the other side of Africa.

The *Avon Castle* ran into a gale off Cape Frio which kept most of the passengers below decks for

274 THE TREASURE TRAIL

a day or two. Thence the weather was fresh to the latitude of the Cape, where it became equinoctially blustering. It was not sufficiently rough to affect the speed materially, however, and at last the cloud-swathed head of Table Mountain loomed in sight, above the long-desired harbour — seemed as if the long trail was almost done, for success or failure.

Cape Town was swarming with uniforms and campaign khaki, and animated with just renewed peace and the business of peace, but they lay there only six hours before they caught the boat for Durban.

Here was a check. There was no railroad to Lorenzo Marquez, unless they took the long détour through Pretoria, over a line choked with military service, and there was no regular steamer plying. After the two men had spent a fevered day of searching the harbour, however, Bennett discovered a decayed freighter which would sail the next day, and he promptly engaged three passages at an exorbitant figure.

Then there was a day to wait, and two days more at sea, and these proved the most trying days of all. It was so near the goal, — a goal which, perhaps, they would never reach! The sun blazed down hotly on the unshaded decks as the rusty steamer wallowed along at the speed of a horse-car,

THE OTHER WAY ROUND 275

while they all three leaned over the bows, watching for the first glimpse of the Portuguese harbour.

They reached it just before sunset. A white British gunboat was lying in the English River, and there was little shipping in the bay except native craft. A flock of shore-boats swarmed about the steamer as she dropped anchor, the customs launch having already come aboard.

"See that! By thunder, that's Henninger!" cried Bennett, pointing to a good-sized and very dirty Arab dhow lying some fifteen fathoms away. She was the nearest craft in the harbour, and here were a dozen or more men moving about her decks. Standing in the stern with a glass to his eye, which was turned on the steamer, was a white man who looked familiar to Elliott as well.

"I've you're right. That'll be his ship. I caught a flash of eye-glasses on another fellow — that'll be Sullivan," exclaimed Elliott, excitedly, and Bennett sent a long hail over the water.

"Ahoy! The dhow! Hen-ning-er! How-oop!"

The man with the glass waved his hat, and two other men hurried up to the dhow's stern.

"Come along. Let's go aboard her now," Bennett exclaimed, on fire with impatience.

Elliott looked sharply at Margaret. She was flushed with excitement, as he could see in the quick tropic twilight, and her lips were set in a

276 THE TREASURE TRAIL

determined line. Her baggage was hurried on deck and sent down into a shore boat at the end of a line, and in another minute they were being ferried to the dhow.

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CHAPTER XVI.

THE END OF THE TRAIL

"ELLIOTT! Thank heaven!—is that you at last?" exclaimed Henninger, hurrying up to the rail as the boat hooked on the dhow's side. "Why in the name of everything didn't you cable as I told you?"

Henninger's voice had the same imperious ring, though he was dressed in a very dirty flannel shirt and a pair of duck trousers that had long ago been white, supported by a leather belt. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows, and arms and face were burned to a deep reddish brown. Hawke and Sullivan were dressed as unconventionally as the chief in costumes to which Sullivan's gold eye-glasses and urban countenance lent the last touch of eccentricity. In the bow was a cluster of half-nude Arabs.

"I didn't cable because I couldn't," Elliott replied. "I don't know myself where the spot is."

"What did you mean, then, by saying you had found it? How are you, Bennett?—glad to see you! What—who's this?" as his eye fell upon

278 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Miss Margaret, who had just clambered over the rail. "We don't want any women aboard here."

"This is Miss Margaret Laurie, Henninger," explained Elliott. "She knows where the place is. She has a map of it, and she's going with us to show us."

Henninger bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction.

"No, she's not going with us," he said, decisively. "This is no picnic — no place for women. I'll have to ask you to give us that map, Miss Laurie, at once. We have to sail immediately. We've been waiting here, on the raw edge, for over a week."

"I shall not give you the map," Margaret returned, firmly. "I am going to sail with you."

"Then I'm sorry, but I'll have to take it," said Henninger, and stepped quickly forward.

"None of that, Henninger," exclaimed Elliott, but before he could interfere further, the girl had whipped a black, serviceable revolver from the dress, the same weapon which Elliott had seen her use in Lincoln.

"Stop," she said, directing its muzzle at Henninger's chest. "I'll show you my map when we're out of sight of land."

Henninger stopped short, looked at her queerly, and finally broke into a small, amused chuckle.

THE END OF THE TRAIL 279

"Put away your little gun, Miss Laurie," he said. "I fancy I made a mistake. I reckon you can come with us if you want to, if the other boys don't object. Oh, come, don't break down after that gun-play."

"I'm not — not breaking down," said Margaret, faintly, but still firmly. "But I think I'd like to sit down."

Henninger handed her an empty keg, which seemed to be the nearest thing to a chair on board, and she collapsed. The twilight had deepened to almost total darkness.

"Bring a lantern aft, you!" shouted Henninger, and one of the men in the bow made a light and brought it to the stern. His brown Arab face shone in the circle of illumination, an aquiline, predator profile, and his eyes flashed upon the group of white men around the girl.

Sullivan brought her a tin cup of tepid water into which he poured a little whiskey, and she drank it with a wry face. She glanced around at the circle of roughly dressed men, at the litter of miscellaneous articles that encumbered the deck of the rough native boat, and shuddered. A moist, unhealthy smell came off shore, there was a sound of loud and violent altercation in Dutch from the deck of a neighbouring barque, and a couple of pistol-shots cracked from somewhere along the wharves.

280 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Elliott moved closer to her and laid his hand upon her arm.

"I didn't know it would be like this," she murmured.

"Don't be frightened," said Elliott. "There's no one here to be afraid of. But don't you think you had better go ashore, after all? The American consul will make you comfortable till we get back, you know."

"No — anything rather than that city! I'm not afraid, only tired out. I've come all the way from China," she said to Henninger, "almost without stopping, and here I thought I'd be among friends."

"So you are," the Englishman assured her. "Only just look at this boat. We've got no accommodation for ladies. You'll just have to rough it like the rest of us. And there's some danger; there may be a fight before we're through. And our own crew would cut our throats if we didn't keep them cowed. I still think you'd better go ashore and stay there. But if you are willing to take your chances, you're welcome."

"I'll take the risks, of course, and I don't want any favours because I'm a girl. I'll just be one of your party. When can we get started?"

"The tide's on the ebb now, and everything is shipped," Hawke remarked.

"Yes, no use waiting," said Henninger. "I'll

THE END OF THE TRAIL 281

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speak to the reis. Halloo, Abdullah! Come aft
a moment."

"Who's the reis?" Bennett inquired.

"He's the captain, that is, the sailing-master
under our orders," Sullivan explained. "You see,
none of us knew anything about navigation. He's
a fine old fellow, on the dead square, and hand and
glove with us. We're paying him a small fortune
for the run, and he's the only man aboard, except
ourselves, who knows anything of what we're
after."

The reis came aft deliberately, a finely athletic
Arab past middle age, with an aristocratic coffee-
coloured face and a short grizzled beard. He was
dressed in spotless white, and wore a short sword
and dagger in his sash. Henninger conferred aside
with him for a few minutes.

"All right," said the Englishman, returning.
"The anchor will be up directly and we'll be off.
High time, too. Meanwhile, I'd like to hear what
you've been doing, Elliott. I got your letter from
Hongkong."

Elliott thereupon briefly narrated the surprising
developments of the past month.

"I see. You were a bold woman to try to hold
us up, Miss Laurie," said Henninger, grimly.
"Other people have tried it, but not often twice."

282 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"There's a good chance that we'll be in time, after all," said Sullivan.

"Of course we will!" Margaret cried. "What's that?"

It was the rattle as the crew manned the windlass. The chain cable came in grating harshly, and the dhow glided forward and swung round as she was hove short. A couple of Arabs hauled around the big lateen mainsail, and then came aft to perform the same office for the smaller mizzen-sail, while the reis himself took the helm, which was a heavy beam projecting fully ten feet inboard over the stern. The anchor was broken out and came up ponderously against the bows.

"We're off!" exclaimed Hawke, boyishly.

The dhow began to move slowly down the river under the ebb-tide, and gradually gathered way in the slight breeze from the land, — the dark land of Africa that gloomed behind them. The treasure hunt was really begun.

Upon the dhow's after-deck no one spoke for several minutes. Every one of the adventurers was doubtless busy with his own reflection, and there was an impressive touch about this silent putting forth into the darkness — a darkness not so deep as their own ignorance of the end of that voyage. And every one felt instinctively that much would be lost

THE END OF THE TRAIL 283

as well as won before that cargo should be raised that had cost the lives of so many men already.

A sudden recollection shook the spell of silence from Elliott.

"That other party at Zanzibar — what about them?" he asked.

"They got there over two weeks ago, just before I left," Henninger answered. "There were two men. They must have been your friends Sevier and Carlton, by your description, and they were trying to hire some sort of craft and crew. Ships happened luckily to be scarce at Zanzibar just then, and they hadn't made any headway when I came here to superintend things. Sullivan had chartered this boat already, and I picked up Hawke at Mozambique as I came down. They can't have much the start of us at the most."

"And what then?" demanded Bennett.

"Why, we outfitted this dhow, and no joke it was. We were lucky in picking up a full diving outfit. It's badly battered, but we got it cheap, and it'll serve. We hired a Berber Arab with it, who used to work on the sponge boats in the Levant and understands it. Then we had to rig a rough derrick apparatus to hoist heavy weights aboard by man-power. We had to get a crew, and provisions and arms — no end of things. It was like stocking a shop. We finished the job five days ago, and

284 THE TREASURE TRAIL

we've been waiting ever since for a message from you."

"We'd have murdered you if we could have caught you. We were about ready to go off our heads," Hawke supplemented.

The dhow was clearing the river mouth, and the Arab skipper hauled her course to the northward. The breeze was fresher outside, and she rapidly increased her speed, rolling heavily under the seas, for she was in light ballast.

"We've arranged to take turns standing watches," said Henninger. "One of us must always be on guard till we get back. I'll take the first watch, from nine o'clock till midnight, and then Hawke and then Sullivan, three hours apiece. Elliott and Bennett will take their turns the next night, and this arrangement gives two men a full sleep every night."

"I'll take my turn," interposed Margaret.

"No," said Henninger, in a tone that closed the question. "The rest of us sleep on blankets spread on the deck because it's so hot, Miss Laurie, but you can have the cabin, or we'll swing you a hammock amidships. But you'd suffocate in the cabin, I'm afraid. You said you didn't want any favours, and we can't give you any."

Margaret chose the hammock, which an Arab seaman was ordered to sling for her. But no one

THE END OF THE TRAIL 285

turned in for two more hours; there was too much excitement in the actual, long-delayed start. But the cool sea-wind brought quiet, and excitement gave place at last to intense weariness.

Elliott spread his blanket beside the rail only a couple of yards from Margaret's hammock.

"If anything should frighten you in the night, just speak to me and I'll hear you instantly," he remarked, as he lay down.

"All right," she replied; but he felt more than certain that whatever the alarm, she would sooner have bitten off the end of her tongue than have appealed to him for help.

Elliott awoke several times during the night. The dhow was rushing forward at, it seemed to him, tremendous speed, and he was spattered occasionally by smart splashes of foam from over-side. Margaret's hammock was swaying heavily in the roll, but she appeared to be asleep, and all was quiet on deck. At the stern he could see the white figure of the steersman leaning hard against the tiller, and there was a dark form beside the rail, undoubtedly one of his friends on the watch.

At last he awoke again with a start, to find it broad day. The dhow's decks were wet; there was a cloudy sky, and a fresh wet wind blowing from the southeast. No land was anywhere in sight; the sea, gray as iron, was covered with racing

286 THE TREASURE TRAIL

whitecaps. Looking at his watch, he found that it was half-past five, and he arose and walked aft, feeling a trifle cramped and stiff, to where Sullivan was lounging out the last hour of his duty. Margaret still slept profoundly in her hammock.

"What do you think of our clipper? I picked her out," said Sullivan, walking forward to meet him.

Elliott was now able for the first time to get a clear view of the craft upon which he had embarked. The dhow was about ninety feet long and rather broad in the beam, with two masts stepped with an extravagant rake forward, each bearing a great lateen sail. There was a long, knifelike sheer to her cutwater, and a great overhang to her stern, and she was decked completely over, with forward and aft companion ladders leading below.

"She seems to be able to sail," replied Elliott, glancing at the racing water alongside.

"That's no lie. The skipper says she can do fourteen knots with the right kind of a wind. Her name's the *Omeyyah*, or words to that effect. She'd make a sensation in the New York Yacht Club, wouldn't she?"

"What's your crew like? Are they really the tough gang that Henninger said?"

"Oh, I fancy he was piling it on to frighten that girl. She's dead game, isn't she? No, the men

THE END OF THE TRAIL 287

are all coast Arabs — pretty peaceable lot, I reckon. You see, they're all of the same tribe as the reis, and he's guaranteed good behaviour from them. Besides, we're well armed. There's a big revolver apiece and a dozen Mauser rifles down below, with a thousand cartridges. Second-hand military rifles can be bought at bargain prices in Lorenzo Marquez just now."

Henninger came aft at that moment, looked earnestly at sea and sky, and drew a bucket of water from over the side for his ablutions. Elliott and Sullivan followed his example; and when Margaret appeared a few minutes later from behind the mizzen-sail, she, too, was served with a bucket of salt water and a towel.

"I'm going to braid my hair as I used when I was at school," she exclaimed, laughing, after an unsuccessful attempt to reduce the curls to order. Her eyes shone; her cheeks glowed after the salt water, and her voice had a gay ring. For the first time an unwilling conviction began to invade Elliott that perhaps after all this expedition was better for her than to remain in America, brooding and waiting.

"We'll have the cabin fixed up a little for you, with a wash-stand and a bit of a mirror," said Henninger. "You can sleep in that hammock, if you like, but you'll want some corner of your own. No

288 THE TREASURE TRAIL

one else will want to go into the cabin; it's too hot. We live on deck."

"What else do we live on?" demanded Elliott. "Isn't it nearly time for breakfast?"

"Not for half an hour. And while we're waiting, perhaps Miss Laurie will —"

Margaret understood, and she silently produced from inside her blouse the folded paper which Elliott had seen at San Francisco.

"This is the map my father made," she said, opening it and handing it to the chief.

Every one crowded round to look. It was a carefully drawn sketch map of a portion of the Mozambique Channel and the Zanzibar coast, and there was a small island marked with a cross and with its latitude and longitude — S. 13, 25, 8, and E. 33, 39, 18.

Henninger produced a large chart of the East Coast and compared the two. "The place must be just a little south of Mohilla Island," he said. "It's two or three hundred miles from Ibo Island, where they'll look first."

"How far from here?" asked Hawke, who had come aft while they were talking.

"I don't know exactly where we are now, but I should think it must be a good eight or nine hundred miles."

"Good heavens!" Bennett cried in dismay.

THE END OF THE TRAIL 289

"But then it's five hundred miles or so from Zanzibar, and we may have got started before them. We can run the distance in five or six days, or maybe in less, if this wind holds," looking up at the gray-streaked southern sky.

"It'll hold," said Hawke. "The reis told me last night that the southeast wind blows all the time at this season. It's a trade-wind, I fancy."

"And I think," remarked Henninger, "that there's a strong current setting north through the channel that will help us two or three knots an hour."

This important bit of oceanography was indeed corroborated by the chart, and it put the whole party in excellent spirits, not even to be spoiled by the execrable breakfast that was presently brought on deck. Ice, milk, or butter were impossibilities on the *Omcyyah*, and the provisioning consisted chiefly of American canned goods which did not require cooking, and of mutton and rice which the Moslem in the galley did his usually successful best to spoil. Only in one thing was he an artist; the superb coffee made amends for all the rest.

All that day the log-line was kept running, and showed an average speed of nearly eleven knots, with an increase toward evening as the wind freshened. The adventurers lounged about the decks, with no books to read, with nothing to do, but

290 THE TREASURE TRAIL

feeling an exhilaration from the rapid movement of the small craft which a steamer could never give at double the speed. Away to port the coast of Africa showed occasionally as a bluish darkening of the sea-line, and faded again. Two or three dhows like their own passed them beating down the channel, and once a long smear of smoke on the sky indicated a steamer hull down under the eastward horizon.

The second day passed much like the first, but the sun set cloudily, and it rained during the night. At daybreak the wind was much fresher, and it strengthened during the forenoon, veering more to the east. At noon the dhow was heeling over heavily, and an hour later the skipper ordered a reef taken in the mainsail. The good wind continued to smarten until by the middle of the afternoon it was difficult to maintain footing on the sloping and slippery deck. The sky was a flat, windy gray; the sea had not a tinge of blue, and was covered with sweeping white-crested rollers, through which the *Omeyyah* ploughed nobly. Occasionally she took one over the bows with a bursting smash, sending a drenching cascade over the decks clear to the stern. It took two men to hold the kicking tiller-head, and the adventurers clung to the rigging upon the windward side, disregarding a ducking that could not be avoided, for it

THE END OF THE TRAIL 291

seemed that oilskins was the one item of equipment that had been forgotten.

"How fast are we going?" Margaret cried to Elliott, trying to keep her wet hair out of her eyes. The rattle and creak of the straining rigging and blocks almost drowned her voice.

"Thirteen knots, last time the log was taken," Elliott shouted back.

She made a gesture of triumph; at that rate they would surely win. Henninger came up unsteadily, holding to the rail, with his wet linen clothes clinging to him like a bathing-suit.

"The reis wants to run for shelter somewhere on the coast," he shouted. "He's afraid we're running right into a monsoon or something."

"Tell him to go to the deuce!" cried Elliott. "This is just what we want, and more of the same sort."

"That's what I think," said Henninger, and he retraced his difficult way to the stern, where the Arab skipper himself stood beside the helmsmen. Abdullah seemed to object to the recklessness of his employer, and apparently a violent altercation ensued, but drowned at a distance of ten feet by wind and water. It must have ended in the submission of the reis, for the dhow continued to drive ahead, half under water and half above it.

Meals were only a pretence that day. The

292 THE TREASURE TRAIL

hatches had been battened down, and no one left the deck, but Elliott brought a quantity of biscuits and canned salmon from the galley, which every one ate where he stood. It rained furiously that night, and with the rain the wind seemed to moderate, in spite of the fears of the skipper. During the next forenoon it remained intermittently fresh, but remained powerful enough to drive the dhow at an average speed of ten knots all day. By sunset, Henninger calculated that they must have run nearly nine hundred miles, and should sight Mohilla Island the next day, supposing they were neither too far east nor west. It had been impossible to take an observation for the last two days, so that his estimate could not be verified.

It rained again early the next morning, but cleared brilliantly in an hour or two, and the decks steamed. Sullivan, who had learned to take an observation, brought up a second-hand sextant and a chronometer of doubtful accuracy, and these instruments indicated at noon that the expedition was about forty miles south-southwest of the desired point. Allowing for errors, they should sight the wreck before sunset.

The breeze had been gradually failing all day, but it had served its purpose, and it would certainly last till dark. The course was hauled more to the northwest, and Henninger himself ascended into

THE END OF THE TRAIL 293

the main-rigging with a good glass, while the rest of the party clustered at the bows. As the dhow glided easily over the shimmering sea, every eye was strained, not so much in search of the island as for sail or steam that would tell them that they had been anticipated at the wreck. About three o'clock Sullivan disappeared from the deck, and Elliott, who had occasion to go below, found him unpacking the rifles and putting clips of cartridges into the magazines.

"It's time we were getting these things ready," he remarked, with a grimmer expression than Elliott had ever seen his imperturbable countenance assume.

"Do you think we'll be in time?" Margaret asked him very anxiously, when he returned to the deck.

"I'm sure I don't know any more than you do," replied Elliott.

"If we're too late, or if the wreck isn't there — I'll never forgive myself!" she breathed, desperately.

"You begin to appreciate what you've done?" said Elliott, trying to look at her sternly, but his glance softened; he wanted to comfort her, to tell her that it didn't matter after all whether they found the treasure or not, since there was something better in life than gold. For a moment it

294 THE TREASURE TRAIL

seemed to him that she almost expected it, but before the moment was passed Henninger hailed the deck.

"I think I've sighted it. There's something, anyway."

Hawke burst out into a joyous whoop of excitement. "What direction?" called Bennett. "Any other ship in sight?"

"A little more to port."

The course was hauled a little more. "No sign of any other vessel anywhere," Henninger added, after carefully sweeping the horizon with his binoculars.

"Hurrah!" cried Margaret. "I knew we would win!"

"We haven't won yet. They may have come and gone," Hawke interposed; and at this reminder every one became nervously silent, gazing ahead. After twenty minutes a whiter spot began to appear upon the blue sea-line.

As the island was gradually lifted, it appeared, as Bennett had described it, to be a good-sized and absolutely barren patch of sand and shingle. It seemed about half a mile long, and a couple of hundred yards wide at the widest point, with a single eminence rising to a height of perhaps a hundred feet near the eastward end. All around it to windward a line of foam and spray marked

THE END OF THE TRAIL 295

the dangerous reefs, and a cloud of sea-birds wheeled flashing in the sun overhead. But the gaze of the adventurers was not fixed upon the island, but upon a great heterogeneous mass that stood up among the breakers, white with the droppings of the birds, but still showing the red of rusty iron, a battered skeleton, having no longer any resemblance to a ship, but nevertheless all that was left of the unlucky *Clara McClay*.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TREASURE

THE gold-seekers gazed eagerly, and, as regards Elliott at least, with strange emotions of excitement, at the ruins of the vessel they had come so far to see, whose name had been familiar so long, but which none but Bennett had ever seen. But it was not all of the treasure-ship that lay staked upon the reef. She had evidently broken in two, and the forward and larger portion had been swept into the lagoon-like space beyond the rocks, where it could just be made out as a shapeless bulge of iron scarce showing above the surface. In reply to a question from Henninger, Bennett stated that the gold-chests had been in the forehold, and must be, consequently, submerged. Even if they had been in the after portion they must surely have been shaken out of the wretched tangle of plates and rods that formed the relics of that half of the vessel.

The dhow was brought up cautiously, with the lead constantly going, and in eight fathoms the reis gave the order to anchor by Henninger's direction.

"We'll find a better anchorage on the lee side of the island," remarked the chief, "but it'll be dark in an hour and we'd better lie here for the present."

"Why, aren't you going to look over the wreck right away?" demanded Hawke, in surprise.

"What's the use? We can't do anything to-night."

"Then I'll row over there alone. Hanged if I can stay here all night with maybe a fortune within a couple of hundred yards and not go to see if it's there," said Hawke.

This speech found an answer in the hearts of all, and Henninger, outvoted, ordered the dhow's small boat over the side. Margaret's desire to visit the wreck was overruled, and Sullivan preferred also to remain behind, but the rest of the adventurers rowed themselves toward the reef.

The tide was rising and they were able to bring the boat alongside the wreck, by careful steering. The fragment of the steamer was lying almost upon her beam-ends, so that it was possible to grasp her rail by standing up in the boat. The deck was too sharply inclined to stand on it, however, and was besides deeply covered with the droppings of sea-birds. The deck-houses were quite gone, great cracks yawned in the deck-plates, the hatches and companionways were vast gaping holes, while on

298 THE TREASURE TRAIL

the other side the deck seemed to have broken entirely clear from the side plates.

"No use in going aboard," said Bennett, but Hawke scrambled on hands and knees to the companionway hole, and the rest followed him through the filth. The stairs were gone, but they slid easily to the deck below, where, in the low light that entered freely through a score of yawning gaps in her side, they viewed a scene of ruin even more depressing than that upon the deck. Not a trace of man's occupancy was left. Everything wooden or movable had been swept out by the wind and sea that had raged through and over the wreck, and they could hear the water washing hollowly in the hold below.

There was nothing to tell whether the ship had been visited before them, and there seemed little possibility of settling this great question that night. "We might as well go back," said Elliott, after they had stared at the desolation for a few minutes.

"No, I'm going to have a look into the hold before I sleep," Hawke insisted, and he began to clamber down the cavernous gulf that led to the interior of the ship.

Henninger, Elliott, and Bennett meanwhile went back to the deck and perched precariously upon the broken rail while they waited for their comrade's return. Hawke was gone for a long time, however,

and at last a sudden outburst of wild shrieks arose from the bowels of the ship.

"He must have got caught somewhere and can't get back," exclaimed Elliott, and they returned below hurriedly. They had scarcely reached the lower deck, however, when Hawke reappeared, dripping wet, with his face distorted with some emotion.

"It's there! It's there — tons of it!" he cried, and his voice broke on the words. "Come along! I'll show you!"

They tumbled after him at the risk of breaking their necks, for the iron plates hung in torn flaps, and the ladders were broken or gone. But at last they peered down the hatch. The light was faint, coming principally through the great fissures, but they could dimly make out a heap of miscellaneous freight, cases and hogsheads and crated machinery that had tumbled against the ship's side when she heeled, and now lay in several feet of water. Some of it had actually fallen through the holes in the bottom that had enlarged with pounding on the rocks, but the upper articles of the mass showed above water. Hawke sprang recklessly down upon the pile, and splashed in to his knees.

"Be careful. You'll break a leg if you slip on those crates," Henninger warned him.

But Hawke paid no attention. "This is it!" he

300 THE TREASURE TRAIL

shouted, his voice resounding hollowly in the hold. He struck his hand upon a wooden box about three feet in diameter. "It's stencilled with that corned beef mark, and it's heavy as lead. You can't stir it. See!" He strained at the case, which refused to move.

"Bennett, please row back to the dhow and bring an axe and a lantern," Henninger ordered, coolly. "We'll see what's in that box. And don't say anything to them aboard. We don't want to raise their expectations."

Bennett must have rowed at racing speed, though the fifteen minutes of his absence seemed an hour to those who awaited him. All four men then descended upon the pile of unsteady freight, where the lantern light showed that the case in question was indeed marked with a stencil that Bennett remembered. But this time the box might really contain corned beef.

The steel would show, and Hawke attacked the case with the axe. It was strongly made and bound with iron, while its water-soaked condition made it the more difficult to cut, but he presently succeeded in wrenching off a couple of boards. The interior was stuffed with hay.

Hawke thrust his arm into the wet packing, and burrowed furiously about. Presently he withdrew it — and hesitated before he exposed his discovery

to the light of the lantern. He held an oblong block of yellow metal.

"God!" said Bennett.

They all stared as if hypnotized by the small shining brick that shone dully in the unsteady light. Then Bennett flung himself upon the case and began to rip out the hay in armfuls, swearing savagely when it resisted.

"Here, stop that! Stop it, I say!" cried Henninger. "We don't want that case gutted — not now."

He put a powerful hand on Bennett's shoulder, and dragged him back. Bennett wheeled with a furious glare, that slowly cooled as it met Henninger's steady gaze. Elliott was reminded of the end of the roulette game at Nashville.

"We must leave it packed," the chief continued. "We don't want to go back to the dhow with a lot of loose gold bricks for all the crew to see. We'll have to trans-ship the cases whole. Is this the only corned beef box?"

They found another heavy case bearing the same stencil and half-buried among the freight under a foot of water. There were no more in sight, though others might have been invisible among the débris. Apparently only a small portion of the treasure had been shipped in the after-hold, but the discovery of any of it proved conclusively that no man had

302 THE TREASURE TRAIL

visited the wreck before them. As they rowed back to the dhow they were strangely silent, and Elliott, feeling slightly dazed and drunken, understood their taciturnity.

"Congratulations, Miss Laurie," said Henninger, as he climbed over the rail. "You'll be an heiress to-morrow."

"Was it there?" faltered Margaret; and Henninger handed her the golden brick, after a cautious glance around the deck. She came near dropping it when she took it in her hands.

"How heavy it is!" she exclaimed. "How much is it worth?"

"Two or three thousand dollars," replied Henninger.

Margaret gave a little gasp. "Here, take it." She thrust it back to Henninger. "I'm almost afraid of it. I never had so much money in my life at once. I can't imagine that it's really true. I hoped, but—please don't look. I believe I'm going to cry!"

She turned aside and did cry quietly for a couple of minutes, with her head on the rail, while the men preserved an embarrassed silence.

"I'm better now," she said, wiping her eyes. "I'm ashamed to be so silly, but it was the excitement, and the waiting, and the success, and—everything. What are we going to do now?"

"We can't do anything more to-night," returned Henninger. "We must have light to locate the rest of the stuff, for it's mostly in the lagoon, you know. At least, we suppose so, for we only found two cases on the wreck. Bennett says he counted twenty-three cases in the forehold, and that will all have to be got by diving. We might get out our diving apparatus to-night and rig the derrick."

There was not much sleep on the *Omeyyah* that night. The diving armour was brought up from the hold, cleaned and oiled, and the air-tubes tested. They mounted the air-pump between decks with big driving-wheels, adjusted the manometer, ed the life-line, and made everything ready for the descent. The impromptu derrick was also set up, consisting of a strong spar forty feet long hinged in an iron socket at the foot of the mizzen-mast, with a block and tackle at the extremity and a geared crank at the base. As it was not likely that the cases of hay and gold would weigh over two or three hundred pounds, this rude apparatus would be sufficient to hoist them aboard. Henninger meanwhile cleared out the room that had been prepared below for the reception of the treasure. This was a corner of the after-cabin, partitioned off by three-inch planks, totally dark, and entered only by a low and narrow door fastened

304 THE TREASURE TRAIL

with four heavy iron bars, each locked into its socket with a Yale lock. The after part of the dhow had been bulkheaded off from the forward portion with heavy planks, so that no man could gain access to the cabin except by the cabin ladder on the quarter-deck.

These preparations were finished by two o'clock in the morning, however, and there was nothing then to do but wait for daylight. A cool air breathed on the sea, though scarce a breeze stirred; the stars were white fire in the velvet sky, with the hill on the island rising dark against them. The adventurers lounged about the deck, talking in low tones, with their eyes ever fixed upon the indistinct shape of the wreck that lay amid the wash on the surf. But weariness brought sleep after all, and silence gradually fell upon the deck.

Elliott was awakened from violent dreams by some one shaking him. He opened his eyes to find daylight on the sea, though the sun had not yet risen.

"Get up," said Hawke. "We've got to make a long day of it."

Elliott sprang up, broad awake instantly. The rest of the party were already astir, and in a few minutes the cook brought them coffee, canned salmon, corned beef, and biscuits.

"The first thing is to try to locate the cases that

are sunk," said Henninger, as they breakfasted hastily. "While we're at it, we must see if we can't find a way to get the dhow into the lagoon. If we can't do that, we can't fish up the chests bodily. We'd have to break them and bring up the bricks one by one, and I'd rather take almost any chances than that."

"But there must be plenty of water inside the reef," Hawke remarked. "The wreck's sunk almost out of sight, and the dhow only draws four or five feet, doesn't she?"

"That's so," said Henninger, gulping down his coffee. "We'll try it. And, above all things, don't any of you say the word 'gold' above your breaths. That's a word that's understood in all languages."

The meal did not last five minutes, and Henninger, Bennett, and Elliott descended into the boat and pulled toward the line of reefs in search of a gap into the lagoon. They rowed nearly half a mile, and rounded the island to the west, in fact, before they found any opening in the barrier. Here, however, they came upon a gap quite wide enough to permit the passage of the dhow, and in the lagoon there was, as Hawke had estimated, a depth of from one to three and in one spot of five fathoms.

They rowed eastward again toward the wreck. The sunken part of the *Clara McClay* lay in about

306 THE TREASURE TRAIL

twenty feet of water, and had been swept round till it rested almost at right angles to the other half. It had, like the stern, toppled abeam, so that the decks lay almost perpendicular, and about three feet of the side rose above the water. The funnel was broken off, as well as the masts, and on looking down through the clear water it appeared that the engines had burst loose and smashed through the side of the steamer. A medley of wheels, rods, and cranks were visible, and the bottom was scattered thick with coal. Otherwise, probably owing to the protection afforded by the water, this portion of the steamer did not appear to have suffered so severely as the after half.

They rowed all around the sunken mass of iron that revealed nothing of what it might contain.

"There's the hatch where I went down," said Bennett. The hatch was still closed, and was some eight feet under water.

"Diving will be the only way to go down there again," Elliott remarked.

"Yes," said Henninger. "No use looking at it from here. Let's get the dhow up alongside."

They regained the dhow as the sun rose, and the reis got the *Omeyyah* under sail. There was just wind enough to move her, and the boat led the way and coned her in, through the gap in the reef and across the lagoon till alongside the rusty

bones of the wreck. Here the anchor dropped with a short cable to keep her from drifting, and as a further precaution the boat carried a second cable with a kedge anchor, and fixed it among the rocks of the reef.

"Now," said Henninger, when they had returned aboard, "where's the diving-suit? I'm going down."

"I thought you said you had an Arab expert for the diving," said Elliott, in surprise.

"So we have, but I'm afraid to send him down till I've had a look first. The gold cases may have burst, and you don't know what sights he'd see. I don't trust this crew, so I'm going below myself this time."

"By thunder, I wouldn't crawl into that wreck in a rubber jacket, not for a ship-load of gold," said Bennett, earnestly. "We don't know whether the diving-machine works right. Better try it on the dog."

Henninger appeared struck by this consideration, but after a little hesitation he persisted in his purpose. Hawke brought the suit on deck, the rubber and canvas jacket, the weighted shoes and the copper helmet, and Henninger accoutred himself under the directions of the Berber expert. Before the helmet was screwed on, the air-pumps were tested again, and appeared to be efficient.

308 THE TREASURE TRAIL

A couple of Arabs were stationed in the waist to turn the big wheels that drove the pumps, and Henninger's head disappeared inside the helmet with its great goggle eyes.

He puffed out remarkably as the air was pumped into the suit, and Elliott and Hawke assisted him to stagger along the deck, and over the dhow's rail. Thence he stepped down upon the uncovered part of the steamer, and slid down the sloping deck till he was entirely submerged. A string of bubbles began to arise.

Every one on board, except the men at the pumps, lined the rail and watched him eagerly. He checked himself at the hatch, looked up and waved his hand. Then he attacked the hatch with a small axe, and after a few minutes' chopping and levering it gave way, and he wrenched the cover off. It sunk slowly, being water-logged. There was a square, black hole, and after peering into it for a few seconds Henninger slipped inside and vanished.

The life-line and the air-tube slowly paid out, and the bubbles sparkled up intermittently from the hatch. Henninger remained in the hold for about ten minutes, when his grotesque form emerged like a strange sea-monster, and he crawled up the slanted deck again, and came above the water. Sitting on the broken rail of the steamer, he

shouted to them, but his voice came inarticulately through the helm. and, seeing his failure, he gesticulated at the derrick.

"He wants us to lower the grapples," exclaimed Elliott. He ran to the crank and touched it, looking at Henninger, and the helmet nodded affirmatively.

With the assistance of a couple of the crew, the beam was swung round over the wreck, and the grappling-hooks lowered. Henninger caught them as soon as they were within reach, and he descended once more into the hold, carrying the irons with him. He was out of sight for a longer period this time, but he reappeared at last, and clambered with difficulty aboard the dhow.

"Hoist away," he said, as soon as the helmet was unscrewed. "I've got one hooked." His face was much flushed, and he rubbed his eyes dizzily.

"What did you find?" queried Hawke, with excitement.

"All the freight is piled in a heap, higgledy-piggledy, and it's pretty dark down there. I made out the cases we want, though, or at least some of them. I had forgotten that it's so easy to lift weights under water. I heaved those crates and hogsheads around like a dime museum strong man. The irons are hooked on one of them. Let's get it up."

310 THE TREASURE TRAIL

At the word the Arabs at the crank began to revolve the handles. The long spar rose, and an iron-bound, wooden packing-case, about three feet in diameter, appeared at the hatch, and swung dripping out of the water. The dhow heeled slightly at its weight.

"Inboard," commanded Henninger, and the reis translated the order. The beam was swung around till the case hung directly over the after hatchway of the dhow, and, being lowered, it descended accurately out of sight.

Every one rushed down the ladder to look at it as it lay in the centre of a widening pool on the planking, with the grapples still fast. But there was nothing to see; the markings on the box had been almost obliterated by water, though the false stencil could still be made out. On the other side letters had been painted with a black brush, presumably the forwarding directions, but nothing could be made of them. Hawke went out and returned with an axe, but Henninger checked him.

"Why, aren't you going to open it?" said Hawke, staring.

"Better not. We know well enough what's in it. We've got to hurry, work day and night, and get away from here as quick as ever we can."

"Oh, confound it! We'll have to open one of them, anyway. We may have made a mistake.

"Aren't we going to see any of the plunder?" exclaimed Elliott and Hawke, and Margaret added her entreaty.

"All right, go ahead," Henninger gave in. "Open it carefully, though, for we'll want to close the box again. Sullivan, please keep an eye on the hatch to see that nobody looks down."

Hawke released the grapples, and they dragged the case into the cabin, where, with some difficulty, one of the boards of the cover was pried off. A mass of wet, foul-smelling hay appeared below, and Hawke began to drag this out upon the floor, where it made a great pool of sea-water.

The hay was packed very tightly, but in a few seconds Hawke encountered something solid, and brought it to light. It was a dead yellow brick of gold, exactly similar to the one already acquired.

Hawke continued the disembowelling of the case until the floor was swimming with water and heaped with sodden hay, and the pile of yellow blocks grew upon the floor. At last the box was empty.

"Twenty-five," remarked Henninger, who had been counting them as they came out. "We might as well weigh them. There are small scales in the storeroom," — which Elliott at once fetched.

The scales, which were not strictly accurate, indicated the weight of the first brick at a trifle under

312 THE TREASURE TRAIL

eight pounds, and the others all gave the same result. Evidently they had been run in the same mould.

"The latest quotation for pure gold, as I suppose this is, was twenty-five dollars an ounce, or thereabouts. At that rate, how much is each of these bricks worth? Remember, these scales weigh sixteen ounces to the pound."

"Three thousand, two hundred dollars," replied Hawke, after making the calculation. "The whole case will total up — let me see — eighty thousand dollars!"

"I counted twenty-three cases in the forehold, and there are two at least in the after-hold," said Bennett.

"Two millions," said Hawke.

"Two millions!" whispered Margaret, and at her awed tone Hawke burst into a high-pitched roar of laughter. Bennett caught the contagion, and then Elliott, and they laughed and laughed, a shrill nervous peal, till they could not leave off.

"Stop it!" shouted Henninger.

"We'll never have a chance to laugh like this again," Hawke managed to ejaculate, and there was a renewed outburst.

"Brace up. You're all hysterical!" said Henninger, sharply, and they gradually regained self-control. "Come," he continued, "we've got to get

the rest of that stuff aboard. Hawke, you and Miss Laurie will repack that box again just as it was before. Make a memorandum of the number of bricks in it, and, Miss Laurie, you will keep a tally of the boxes as they come down."

This time, Elliott volunteered to go below, and he donned the diving-dress, and lumbered over the side. It was easy enough to slide down the steep slope of the steamer's deck; in fact, he scarcely knew when he became submerged, but it required a summoning of all his courage to jump into the black gulf of the hold.

He floated down through the water as lightly as a falling leaf, however, and landed without a jar upon a miscellaneous mass of tumbled freight. There was a faint green-gold light in the place, and at first it was hard to distinguish anything, but as his eyes grew more accustomed to the strange gloom he made out the articles of cargo distinctly. There were boxes and cases of every size and shape, with barrels and bales and shapeless things in crates — very much the same heterogeneous mixture, in fact, as he had seen in the after-hold.

The air began to buzz in his ears, and according to directions he knocked his head against the valve in the back of the helmet and released the pressure. The coolness penetrated through his armour; and, but for the rubbery taste of the air he breathed,

314 THE TREASURE TRAIL

he found the situation decidedly pleasant, for the depth was too slight to cause any feeling of oppression.

He examined the cases, bending his helmet close over them, for it was not easy to make out their almost erased markings. He found that he had been standing on one of the gold chests, and he hitched the tackles to it, astonished to find that he could move its heavy weight with considerable ease. He signalled through the life-line, and the case was hoisted up, and disappeared out of his sight.

By the time the grappling-hooks returned empty upon him he had found another of the treasure-cases, which he at once sent aloft. He secured four cases in this way, and sent them up in about twenty minutes; and then, beginning to feel a slight nausea from the hot, rubber-flavoured air, he climbed out and made his way aboard the dhow.

Henninger took his place, and sent up two more cases, making seven that were stored in the dhow's cabin. The first one had already been repacked, and Hawke and Bennett were busy stacking the chests in the strong-room, lashing each one strongly to ring-bolts to prevent shifting when the dhow rolled. They opened two more just enough to see that there was certainly gold in each, and closed them again. The heavy weight of the cases was evidence of the amount.

All day long the work went on, under the full blaze of an equatorial sun. The dhow's decks ran with water from the dripping chests, and down below the cabin was flooded, for the boxes were like sponges. With the exception of Margaret, the adventurers were drenched to the skin, and the work grew increasingly difficult when it became necessary to shift the cargo about in the steamer to find the gold cases. When at last it seemed that all had been taken out, the tally showed only fifteen in the strong-room, while Bennett had counted twenty-three in the hold. The missing ones would have to be discovered, and Henninger went down again to search for them.

"I wonder what the crew are thinking of all this," Margaret remarked to Elliott. He had paused at the entrance to the strong-room where she was keeping tally in a note-book as the precious cases came aboard.

"I don't know what they think. I know what the reis told them," returned Elliott. "He told them that we're wrecking the steamer and taking out a lot of cases of cartridges for the sake of the brass and lead. He knows all about it, of course, but the crew would never dream of so much gold being in her."

Margaret shivered a little. "Things have gone almost too smoothly since we sailed. I felt certain

316 THE TREASURE TRAIL

that we would get here in time, and I was right. But now I feel, I hardly know how, as if something was going wrong. I wish we could leave the rest of the gold and go away. We have more than we need now."

"Oh, no," Elliott expostulated. "And there are two more cases in the after-hold, which won't be easy to get out."

"I have been nearly happy," she broke out, after a silence, "happier than I ever expected to be again in my life. I feel almost ashamed of it, after all that I suffered such a little while ago. I see now that it was a dreadful thing for me to come on this expedition; I am surprised that you let me do it. But everybody has been so nice to me. If I had been the sister of all these men they couldn't have treated me with more respect and real kindness. Aren't you almost glad I came, after all?"

"Yes," said Elliott. He hesitated. "Do you know why I wanted all this money?" he went on, bending toward her. "It wasn't for myself."

"What, then?" said Margaret, faintly. "No, don't tell me," she exclaimed, "not yet. Let's be comrades the same as ever, and we haven't got the gold yet, anyway."

"Then I'll tell you when we do get it," Elliott answered; and at that moment another case came down the hatch, and Bennett followed it, breaking

off the conversation. But the girl's "not yet" left a glow of excitement and exultation in Elliott's heart for the rest of the day.

Two more of the missing chests were located at last and sent up. A fourth had been burst; it might have been the very one which Bennett had opened while imprisoned in the hold, and the contents were scattered. After some consultation, Elliott went down again and sent the bricks up in a canvas sack, three at a time, packed in hay to disguise the weight. By the time this was accomplished, it was near sunset, and already growing too dark to see in the hold. Henninger fumed impatiently, but without electric lights it was impossible to work under water after sunset. Besides, the boxes in the after-hold could not by any possibility be reached that night.

Elliott struggled that night between sleepy exhaustion and excited wakefulness, and the rest of the party were in a similar state. All night long he could hear frequent movements; a dozen times he started up anxiously at some sound, only to find that it was the armed guard over the hatchway, but toward morning he slept heavily for a couple of hours.

Work was resumed as soon as a diver could see in the steamer's hold. After looking through all the mass of freight, and turning over much of it

318 THE TREASURE TRAIL

with a lever, the missing cases were at last discovered, and one by one hoisted aboard.

"Now for the other half of the ship," said Henninger, turning his eyes toward the wreck on the reef. "I rather fancy we'll have to dynamite a hole in her side—good God!"

They followed his pointing finger and stood stupefied. Off the eastward end of the island a small steamer was lying, a faint haze of smoke drifting from her funnel, and the red British ensign flying at her peak.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BATTLE ON THE LAGOON

"How did that ship get so close without our seeing her?" cried Henninger, fiercely. "Who was on the lookout?"

It appeared that every one aboard the dhow had been too deeply interested in the salvage operations, and that nobody had been on the lookout at all. The chief snatched up a glass and stared long at the strange vessel, which lay absolutely motionless and perhaps a mile away.

"We'd better clear out. She's a Britisher — as like as not a gunboat," Hawke muttered, nervously.

"Clear out!" snorted Henninger. "She'd overtake us in an hour, with her engines. She's got no guns, that I can see. Ten to one it's our friends from Zanzibar." He continued to gaze through the binoculars.

"By Jove, she's getting ready to lower a boat!" he exclaimed, after a minute or two. "Sullivan, please bring up those rifles and open a case of ammunition. Bring up a case of revolver car-

320 THE TREASURE TRAIL

tridges, too. Elliott, tell the skipper to get those anchors up, and bring her around."

The strange steamer was indeed lowering a boat which was full of men, and as it left her side half a dozen dull flashes, as of blued steel, glimmered in the sun. Sullivan darted below and came up with his arms full of Mausers, which he stacked against the after-rail. The Arabs were set to work at the capstan, and the forward anchor was broken out, but the kedge attached to the reef was allowed to remain for the present. Without it, the dhow would have drifted upon the island, for the bright morning was turning cloudy, with a rising breeze from the southeast.

There was hurry and excitement upon her decks as she lay head to the freshening weather, straining at her single cable. The Arabs were clustered at the bow, talking violently among themselves, and gesticulating at the mysterious steamer. Henninger watched them with an air of suspicion, and proceeded to load his revolver, and put a handful of cartridges in his pocket. Every one followed his example, and Margaret produced her own pistol, which she had not shown since the night of her coming aboard.

"Oh, is there going to be a fight?" she breathed in a tremulous voice, which her bright eyes attributed to excitement rather than to fright.

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 321

"No. At least, I hope not," said Henninger. "If there should be, you'll go below and stay there, Miss Laurie. You understand?"

"Look," she cried, in answer. "They're waving a white flag."

The boat, which had almost reached the barrier reef, had stopped, and a strip of white cloth was being flourished from her stern.

"That settles it," Elliott remarked. "It must be Carlton and Sevier's gang. They want to talk to us."

"We'll talk to them, but they mustn't come alongside us," responded Henninger. "We'll go ashore to meet them. Elliott, will you come with me? The rest of you had better stand by with the rifles while the peace conference is going on."

Elliott and Henninger accordingly descended into the dhow's shore-boat, which swung by its painter, carrying no weapons but their revolvers. Elliott took the oars, and while he rowed Henninger stood up and flourished his handkerchief. The other boat resumed its course at this signal, but was obliged to sheer westward for a quarter of a mile to find an entrance through the ring of reefs. Elliott and Henninger had been ashore for ten minutes when the steamer's party landed at a point a hundred yards eastward upon the beach.

The strangers disembarked, nine of them, and

322 THE TREASURE TRAIL

seemed to consult together for a few moments. Two were in Arab dress, but the rest appeared to be white men of the lowest order, the white riffraff that gathers in the East African ports, a genuinely piratical crew, and every man carried his rifle. Finally, two men came forward with the flag of truce.

"That's Sevier all right," said Elliott, "and Carlton with him."

So it proved, and the Alabaman saluted them with a suave flourish, and without any symptom of surprise.

"Good mo'nin', Elliott," he said. "Ah, I always knew you knew where this place was. We never ought to have let you go, but we were all rattled that night, as you'll remember. I hope you enjoyed your trip to San Francisco?"

"Very much, thanks," said Elliott. "Have you been to Ibo Island?"

"Yes, we've been at Ibo Island. Your slippery old sky-pilot played us a neat trick on that deal. Only for that, we'd have been here two weeks ago. Have you all fished up the stuff?"

"Yes, we've got it all aboard," said Elliott, forgetting the two cases in the stern on the wreck.

"But we've no time for chat," Henninger broke in. "My name's Henninger, and I'm in a way the

BATTLE C' THE LAGOON 323

leader of this party. What do you want with us, gentlemen?"

"I think I met you once at Panama, Henninger," said Carlton, as gruffly as ever.

"Very likely," returned Henninger. "There are all sorts at Panama. What do you want now?"

"We want an even divvy of the stuff."

"We could take it all, you know," put in Sevier, sweetly.

"I think not. We won't divide it," Henninger answered, without hesitation.

"What'll you offer, then?"

This time Henninger reflected. "I suppose you know as well as we do how much there is," he said, slowly, at last. "If my partners agree to it, I don't mind offering you two cases, holding about seventy-five thousand dollars apiece. That will recoup you for your expenses in coming here."

"It won't do," said Carlton, firmly. "Is that your best bid?"

"It's our only one. Take it or leave it," replied Henninger, with great unconcern.

"We've got twenty well-armed men — fellows hired to fight," hinted Sevier, "but we don't want to start trouble."

"Your twenty men will certainly cut your throats on the way back, if you have an ounce of gold," Henninger remarked.

324 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"They might, if we hadn't put the terror into them coming down. Carlton shot one last week."

"You shouldn't let them get so much out of hand as that. But if you accept our offer we'll expect you to put to sea as soon as you have the stuff. In any case, we can't allow you to land on the island. You must keep your distance."

"Think it over," urged Sevier. "We'll take one-third, and let you go away with the rest."

"No," said Henninger.

"Then we'll take it all," Carlton abruptly declared, and walked away. Sevier remained for a moment, looking at Henninger with an expression of regret, and then turned after his companion.

"Quick! Into the boat!" hissed Henninger.

As they pushed off they saw Sevier and Carlton running toward the landing party, who had dropped out of sight behind the scattered rocks on the shore. A confused yell of warning came over the lagoon from the dhow, and, the next instant, half a dozen irregular rifle-shots banged. Elliott ducked low over the oar-handles. His pith helmet jumped from his head and fell into the boat with a round hole through the top; there was a rapid tingling like that of telegraph wires in the air.

Instantly the Mausers upon the dhow began to rattle. Henninger ripped out a curse, and opened an ineffectual fire with his revolver. But the rifle-

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 325

shots from the dhow were straighter. As he tugged at the oars, shaking with wrath and excitement, Elliott saw Sevier go down as he ran, rolling over and over. He was up instantly, but there was a red blotch on the shoulder of his white jacket, and in a few seconds more he was under cover with the rest of his party.

The boat tore through the water, against the wind and waves that were rising upon the lagoon. The enemy had turned their fire principally upon the dhow, but still the bullets seemed to Elliott to follow one another in unbroken succession. He had never been under fire before, and a wild confusion of thoughts rushed through his mind. The boat, he thought, was making scarcely any headway, though Henninger had sat down opposite him and was pushing with all his weight upon the oars. The missiles zipped past or cut hissing into the water. Twice the gunwale was perforated, and then, all at once, they were in the shelter of the dhow's hull.

"What are you doing on deck, Miss Laurie? Go below at once," cried Henninger, angrily, as he climbed on board.

The dhow's company were lying flat on the deck and firing across the rail, which offered concealment rather than shelter. The crew had taken refuge in the forecabin, with the exception of the

326 THE TREASURE TRAIL

reis, who had squatted imperturbably on the deck. Margaret was sitting on the planking behind the mast, with her pistol in her lap.

"I did go below," she answered. "But a bullet came right in through the side of the ship. It's just as safe here. Wingate!" she exclaimed, as Elliott came over the rail, "you're not hurt, are you?"

"No, of course not. Lie down on the deck," said Elliott, irritably, "and put that gun away. You're liable to hurt some one." He felt unaccountably bad-tempered, nervous, excited, and scared.

"If those fellows get on the top of the hill," Henninger snapped, "they'll be able to keep us off the deck. We'd better —"

"Can't we let the dhow drift to the island and capture the whole bunch?" suggested Bennett.

"We'd certainly lose a couple of men in doing it," said Henninger, more collectedly. "I wouldn't risk it. What are they doing on the steamer, Hawke? You've got the glasses."

"They're lowering another boat!" Hawke cried. "Four — six — seven men in her," he continued, peering through the binoculars.

"By thunder, they'll smother us out!" exclaimed Bennett, and the adventurers looked at one another for a moment in silence.

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 327

"That boat mustn't land," said Henninger. "Set your sights for five hundred yards, and don't fire until I give the word; then pump it in as fast as you can. Be sure to hit the boat, if nothing else."

The second boat had left the steamer and was being rowed toward the island at a racing pace, veering to the west, to make the same landing-place as the other. Henninger, struck by a sudden thought, turned to the skipper.

"Abdullah, can any of your men shoot? Bring up three of the best of them and give them rifles. Take one yourself. We must put that boat out of business before she touches the shore."

The reis went below and brought up three Arabs, who grinned as they received the rifles, evidently delighted at the honour. The boat was drawing nearer, still pulling to the west, and the party ashore began to fire more rapidly to cover the landing.

"Never mind them," said Henninger. "Aim at the boat. Now!"

The six Mausers went off like a single shot, and the Arabs poured in their fire a second later. There was instant confusion in the boat, which was just passing through the reef; an oar went up in the air, and a white streak showed on her bow. As fast as the rifles could be discharged the dhow's com-

328 THE TREASURE TRAIL

pany fired, thrusting fresh clips into the magazines when they were empty. The cartridge-cases rattled out upon the deck, and the rank smelling gas from the smokeless powder drifted back chokingly.

"Allah! Allah!" screamed the excited Arabs, as they manipulated their weapons, shooting wildly in the direction of the enemy. But the bullets were coming fast from the shore. Elliott again heard strange sharp sounds whispering past his face. A great splinter flew up from the rail, and suddenly Sullivan stood up jerkily on the deck.

"Lie down!" Henninger howled at him, and the adventurer collapsed. The front of his shirt was covered with bright red blood. Elliott sprang to his side, dropping his rifle.

"Sullivan's hit!" he shouted.

"Never mind him!" roared Henninger. "Let him alone, you fool. Keep up the fire."

The boat was floating crazily about, with oars dipping in contradictory directions. Her crew were standing up or lying down, and firing a few wild shots.

"I'll look after him. Go back to your place," said Margaret, creeping up beside the fallen man.

"Get under cover yourself!" cried Elliott, furiously. "You can't do anything. Why aren't you below?"

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 329

But the concentrated, rapid fire had already done its work. The boat had drifted upon a reef, perforated undoubtedly in a dozen places. She capsized with a sudden lunge upon the rocks, and her crew went into the water, where a few swimming heads presently reappeared.

"Don't fire at them," said Henninger, grimly contemplating the swimmers. "They can't hurt us; they've lost their rifles. How's Sullivan?"

Margaret turned up a pale, frightened face, with eyes that were full of tears. "I—don't know," she faltered.

Sullivan's eyes were open, but his face was already pale, and he lay perfectly motionless on the deck. Henninger ripped open his shirt, wiped the blood from the wound in the chest, and felt his wrist.

"Shot through the heart," he said, laying the arm down very gently. No one spoke; they all gazed silently at the whitening face. A bullet, fired from the island, ripped through the sail and plunged viciously into the bulwark.

"Elliott, you and Bennett carry him below," commanded Henninger, harshly. "No time for mourning now. Miss Laurie, you go below and stay there. Don't bunch together like that, the rest of you. We can't afford to lose any more men."

But for a few minutes the men ashore ceased

330 THE TREASURE TRAIL

their fire. When Elliott came on deck again the smoke had blown clear. The steamer lay immobile in the offing, heaving upon the roughening sea, and the wrecked boat was bobbing up and down in the surf, bottom upward. There were no signs of the fight but the scattered cartridge-cases on the deck, a few splintered holes in the woodwork and a red smear on the planking.

Henninger took the glass and carefully scrutinized the steamer, and then turned his gaze upon the island.

"I don't know what they're up to," he said, with dissatisfaction. "I can't see a hair of them. Either they're lying mighty close, or else they've slipped around the hill and are climbing to the top. I can see another boat on the steamer, but I don't think it'll try to come ashore — not till dark, anyway."

"But they've got nothing but some kind of sporting rifles, burning black powder," said Hawke. "Good rifles, but they haven't near the range of our Mausers. We could lie off and pepper them, if we could get to sea."

"Yes, we must get out of this lagoon. It's a regular trap," said Henninger.

"And they've got no water on the island," Bennett remarked.

At this remark Elliott realized that his throat

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 331

was parching. He brought a bucket of water aft, and they all drank enormously. It was very hot, though the sun was veiled in gray clouds and the sea was rising under the rising southeast wind, the prevailing wind on the east coast at that season.

"There was a rain-water pool on the island when I was there," Bennett went on. "I found it very useful. But it may be dry now, and anyhow it's at the other end of the island, and they can't get to it."

"Hang it all, why can't we put to sea and let the rest of the treasure go?" ejaculated Elliott, sickening at the thought of what the gold had already cost.

"Because with that steamer they'd follow us, wear us out, and maybe run us down," said Henninger. "But we must get out of the lagoon and have sea-room as soon as possible."

Thud! Something cut through the upper portion of the mizzen-sail and plunged into the deck. Whiz-z-ip! Another missile hit the barrel of Bennett's rifle and glanced away, screaming harshly. Bennett dropped the gun from his tingling fingers. A third bullet lodged in the mast, and another ploughed a deep furrow in the rail, and glanced again.

"Where did that come from?" yelled Hawke;

332 THE TREASURE TRAIL

and "Look!" shouted Elliott at the same moment, pointing shoreward.

The top of the hill upon the island was crowned with white smoke, and as they looked three or four fresh puffs of vapour bloomed out and blew down the wind, with a distant popping report. Zip! Thud! the bullets sang down and plunged into the planking.

"They've got to the hill. Scatter! Scatter! Lie down!" cried Henninger, flinging himself flat on the deck. But on the hill not a man was to be seen. The invaders had stowed themselves so snugly behind the irregular boulders that not so much as a rifle muzzle showed, and a plunging fire beat down upon the dhow's exposed after-deck.

"Gee! this is hot!" exclaimed Hawke, as a bullet ploughed the deck not six inches from his shoulder.

"Too hot!" said Henninger. "We can't stay up here." He jumped up and dived for the hatch, and the others followed him, crouching low. They tumbled down the ladder almost in a heap, and found Margaret sitting on a locker in the cabin beside the door of the strong-room. Six feet away Sullivan's body lay, a rigid outline, under a blanket.

"We're trapped sure enough!" exclaimed Hawke, breathing heavily. He went to the stern

BATTLE ON THE LAGOON 333

port-light and looked out cautiously. The window gave a view of the island, where the concealed marksmen had ceased to fire, but the steamer could not be seen.

"The tables are turned. They can starve us out now," Hawke went on nervously.

"Surely not. We can get to sea, can't we, Henninger?" said Elliott.

"I don't know," replied Henninger, abstractedly. He was looking through the port, and he finally thrust his head out to look at the steamer. "Look out!" he cried, dodging inside again with agility.

He had drawn another volley from the watchful rifles on the hill, but the stern timbers of the dhow were thick enough to keep out the lead, and no bullet entered the port. Two or three shots came crashing down through the deck, splintering the under side of the planking, but doing no further damage.

"They're determined to keep us smothered," said Hawke.

For perhaps fifteen minutes there was a lull, and then a man stood up on the hill waving a white streamer, and began to descend. He reached the shore, boarded the boat, and began to row out with some difficulty, but apparent fearlessness. He was easily recognizable through the glass, and when he was within a hundred yards Henninger hailed him.

334 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Don't come any nearer, Carlton. What do you want?"

"We'll give you one-third and let you go," shouted Carlton, standing up in the plunging boat.

"You'll get all of it, or none," answered Henninger, and without another word Carlton bowed himself back to shore.

"Serve him right to take a shot at him," muttered Hawke, handling his rifle.

"No, don't do that," said Elliott. "Let's fight fair, if we are in a close corner."

But the fighting was delayed. For hours deep peace brooded over the island, while the white caps grew, crashing upon the reef, and the dhow strained at her single cable. The steamer was invisible, owing to her position, but she blew her whistle several times in a curious fashion, to which answer was made by the wigwagging of a white cloth just visible above the crest of the hill.

"They're plotting something. I wish I knew what it was," Henninger said, anxiously, scanning the hill with the glass.

"The reis thinks the cable won't hold if the weather freshens much more," said Bennett, who had been conversing with the skipper. "If it breaks we'll drift on the island and they'll soon have us."

"Don't borrow trouble," said Elliott.

THE SHIP

But the bridge was crowded with the long
afternoon passed away, though the strain-
ing could be felt in every part of the vessel, and it
twanged and hummed taut as a violin string.
There were no provisions of any sort in the cabin
and, toward evening, Elliott undertook to go for-
ward along the deck to obtain something from the
galleys. There was no firing for hours, but
the garrison on the ship then demonstrated their
vigilance. Elliott's body was out of the
reach of the distant rifles were snapping, and so sharp
the fire was opened that he had to go back.
The gunner cut a hole in the bulkhead with
a hatch through which food was passed by the crew.
The men in the fore-castle were quietly
smoking and sleeping away the hours, apparently
totally unperturbed by the fight. They had nothing
to do; it was none of their affair, and they were
in safe cover.

Late in the afternoon it had rained heavily for

336 THE TREASURE TRAIL

half an hour, and the sun went down in a bank of clouds. It was perfectly dark in fifteen minutes, and there was every prospect of a rough night. The surf crashed upon the reef, sending showers of spray over the *Clara McClay's* wreck, and occasionally deluging the dhow. The rigging hummed and tingled like the cable, but the breeze appeared to be shifting to the east, for the dhow was drifting to westward, and across the gap in the barrier reef.

In the safety of the darkness the whole party returned to the deck to escape the stifling air of the cabin. The sky was clouded inky black, and intermittent dashes of rain mingled with the spatter of the spray. In the darkness to the eastward gleamed the red starboard light of the steamer, with a white riding-light at her masthead. Complete darkness covered the island and the hill; it was impossible to ascertain whether the landing party were still there or whether they had returned aboard their ship.

Hawke fired an experimental shot at the island, but there was no reply. The night seemed full of mystery and invisible danger, and it was hot and oppressive, in spite of rain and wind. The dhow plunged and quivered as she tugged at her restraining cable, that seemed as if it must break at every lurch. But it held firmly for a whole

anxious hour, when a heavier downpour of rain sent the adventurers below again for shelter.

The possibility of getting to sea was debated, but it seemed too dangerous an attempt in the face of the foul weather and the southeast wind. But the enforced truce and suspense was more harassing to the nerves than any actual conflict could have been. The lamp swinging wildly from the ceiling lit up the cabin with a smoky yellow light; on one side lay Sullivan's corpse under the gray blanket, seern'g, Elliott fancied, to chill the room with its presence; on the other side was the locked and iron-barred door to the gold for which the adventurer had died. The rifles stood stacked in a corner, and the men gathered near the port-hole for the sake of air, and discussed the situation till their ideas were exhausted. After an hour or so, in sheer nervous despair, Henninger and Bennett took to playing seven-up on the floor, and Elliott presently took a hand in the game. He played mechanically, paying no attention to the score, hardly knowing what he did, and seeing the faces of the cards with eyes that scarcely recognized them. Margaret sat on the locker and seemed to doze a little; while Hawke prowled restlessly about, now looking over the shoulders of the card-players, now peering through the port,

338 THE TREASURE TRAIL

and now climbing half-way up the ladder to the deck.

"It's stopped raining," he reported, after one of these ascents. "Looks as if it might clear up." A few minutes later he went up again. They heard his feet on the planking overhead, and then a startled shout.

"The steamer!"

Henninger dropped his cards, and dashed up the ladder, with Elliott and Bennett at his heels.

"What about the steamer?" he cried.

"Where is she? What's become of her?"

That part of the night where the steamer's lights had shone was blank. Henninger whistled, and then swore.

"She was there ten minutes ago," Hawke protested.

"Maybe the wind has blown out her lights. She can't have cleared out, can she?" said Elliott.

"Cleared out? Not a bit of it," said Henninger. "They've doused the lights themselves. Can't you see what they're trying to do? Here, Abdullah! Can we get to sea at once?"

The reis glanced gravely at the darkness where the sea roared through the gap in the reef, and then gravely back to his employer.

"It is as Allah wills," he said. "But it cannot be done by men."

"But Allah does will it!" cried Henninger, violently. "Call your men up. We must be outside the lagoon in half an hour."

"Great heavens, Henninger! you aren't going to try to take the dhow out through the gap in this pitch-dark?" Bennett exclaimed.

"Yes, I am. We've got to do it. Don't you understand that the first thing in the morning we'll be riddled from both sides? Those fellows are bringing up the steamer in the dark, to lie close off our position. But I reckon we can do something in the dark, too."

"You'll smash us, sure," Elliott protested.

"I know something about sailing, and I've seen the Arabs do neater tricks than that at Zanzibar. We can do it. There's a chance, anyhow, and I'd rather see the gold sunk again than have to surrender it in the morning. Confound it, reis, when are we going to start?"

The Arab cast another gloomy glance at the reef, shrugged his shoulders with racial fatalism, and went forward to call up the men. Henninger dashed below, came up with an axe, and started toward the bow.

"Stop! You're not going to cut that cable. Don't you know that the bight'll fly up and kill you?" shouted Bennett, intercepting him.

340 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"That's so. I forgot," admitted Henninger, pausing.

"But the whole scheme is mad — suicidal," Bennett added, angrily.

"No, let's get away at any risk!" exclaimed Margaret, who had come on deck.

"Halloo, you must go below again," said Elliott. "Or, wait a moment." He cut loose a life-belt and buckled it round her. "Perhaps you had better stay on deck after all, for as like as not we're going to the bottom. Hang on to the dhow if we strike, and don't let yourself get carried against the rocks. I'll look after you."

The Arab seamen were stationing themselves about the deck without a protest of word or gesture against the dangerous manœuvre that was to be attempted, and Elliott's courage rose at the sight of their coolness. The danger of the attempt lay almost wholly in the thick darkness. The gap was nearly thirty yards wide, and the weather had shifted so far to the east that the dhow could run out with a wind abeam, provided that she could hit the gap. But there were no lights, no steering guides, but the indistinct break in the whiteness of the surf, and the vague difference in the tone of the breakers where the reef interposed no barrier.

The reis took the tiller, and a seaman went forward, picked up the axe which Henninger had

THE SECOND WRECK 341

dropped, and scanned the cable narrowly. Dextrously, carefully, he struck three light blows with the steel, cutting it partly through, and skipped back out of danger. The dhow heaved; a sensation of rending ran from the bows throughout her timbers; and suddenly, with a bang like a gunshot, the cable parted, and the dhow began to drift rapidly, stern first.

The reis shouted in guttural Arabic, and sheet and tiller brought her round. She began to run diagonally toward the island, heading almost straight for the hill, with the wind abeam. In the bows a seaman cast a short lead-line incessantly, calling the depth with a weird cry. The sky was clearing slightly, as Hawke had said, and Henninger had observed it with a worried expression. The dhow's spread of white canvas would be visible in the night where the black hull of the steamer would remain unseen, and their only chance lay in making open water and running below the horizon before they were sighted by the speedier craft.

After a short tack the dhow went about, and headed back as she had come. The crucial moment was at hand. The reis stared ahead, stooping slightly to get a clear view under the sails, though to Elliott's eyes the darkness was impenetrable.

342 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"Those Arabs can see in the dark like cats," muttered Henninger, at his elbow.

The helmsman brought her up a little more into the wind, and shouted another order. There was a rush of barefooted Moslems across the heeling deck, and the dhow darted forward, straight for a roaring line of invisible rocks.

"What's that?" called Bennett, sharply.

Away in the darkness to the east Elliott too had seen a faint glow in the air and a momentary puff of red sparks blown off and instantly extinguished. It could be nothing but a flash from the funnel of the steamer; she must be coming up, and at full speed. But in another half-minute the dhow would be either in the open sea or at the bottom, and he gripped the rail with a thrill of such intense excitement as he had never known in his life.

For a moment he thought they were going to the bottom. The reef thundered right under the bows. He had no idea where the gap lay, and he started instinctively to go to Margaret, bracing himself for the shock of the smash. A deluge of spray roared over her prow; he imagined he felt her keel actually scrape, and she came up a little more into the wind. He caught a glimpse of the ghostly outline of the rock-staked wreck, whitened with its filth—then there was a wild plunge, a tumult of waters all round them, and then the shock

of the encounter with heavier breakers, the big rollers outside. Drenched, dizzy, and half-blinded, Elliott became aware that the dhow was running more freely to the southwest, and that the surf was booming on the starboard bow.

"We're out!" yelled Henninger. "By Jove, I'll give the reis an extra thousand for this!"

"Look there!" called Hawke, pointing astern. A gust of bright sparks, such as Elliott had seen before, was driving down the wind, followed by another, and another. There was a streak of faint glowing haze in the gloom.

"They're after us. They've sighted our white canvas!" exclaimed Henninger.

"Maybe not. They may be only taking a position off the gap," said Elliott.

No one replied to this suggestion. The adventurers strained their eyes toward the intermittent flashes of sparks and illuminated smoke from the still invisible steamer. She must be half a mile away, but the sparks indicated that she was running at high speed, and she could readily overhaul them, if indeed their escape had been detected.

"She's passed the gap. She's after us!" said Henninger, after a couple of anxious minutes. "Bring up the rifles. It'll come to shooting again."

There was a rush down the ladder to the cabin where the weapons had been left. When they re-

344 THE TREASURE TRAIL

turned to the deck it was almost certain that the steamer was really in pursuit. The gusts of flying sparks were growing continuous; she was forcing her speed, and it seemed to Elliott that he could almost distinguish her black, plunging hull, and hear the vibration of her engines above the charge and crash of the white-topped rollers.

"Haul in as close to the reef as you can," commanded Henninger to the skipper. "We can sail in water where she daren't go."

The leadsman was set to work again, and the dhow steered in close, perilously close, to the white line of surf. She was rounding the western end of the island now, running with a three-quarter wind, but the steamer was cutting down her lead with great strides. The ships were only a quarter of a mile apart; they were less than that; and now Elliott could see the volumes of black smoke rolling furiously across the clearing sky, and now he made out, vaguely but certainly, the dark bulk of the pursuer. She was following them, running recklessly into the shoaling water. The jumping throb of her screw beat across the sea, but she remained dark as midnight, except for the showers of red cinders flying from her draught.

Suddenly a dozen lanterns blazed up on board the steamer. She was scarcely two hundred yards astern, and she seemed to loom like a mountain

THE SECOND WRECK 345

above the dhow. Two shadowy figures stood on her bridge, with tense excitement in every line of the pose as they clutched the iron railing. In the wheel-house the faint outline of another man showed, grasping the spokes, illumined by the dim glow of the binnacle lamp. They heard the crash of the seas on her iron side as she tore ahead; and, startlingly, a brilliant light was flashed on the dhow from a strong reflector, and a gigantic voice bellowed at them through a megaphone.

"Ahoy! Ahoy! the dhow!" it roared. "Henninger, Henninger, heave to instantly, or, by God, we will run you down!"

It was Carlton's voice that shouted, and Henninger in answer heaved up his Mauser. "Fire at the wheel-house!" he cried, and all of his party caught the chance. "Crack! Cr-rack!" the rifles spluttered. Elliott thought he heard a sharp cry. A couple of wild shots flashed in reply from the towering deck. The blinding light went out, and in the glow of the wheel-house Elliott saw the steersman fall, reeling aside, still clinging to the spokes.

The steamer sheered violently to starboard. A man leaped from the bridge to the wheel, but it was too late; she was running too fast, and was already too close to the reefs. A wild yell rang over the sea, drowned by a mighty crash and rattle.

346 THE TREASURE TRAIL

The steamer had plunged, bows on, sheer upon the rocks, and lay there under a shower of whitening spray.

Elliott had shouted, too, in uncontrollable excitement, but when he realized the wreck he turned quickly to Henninger. "We must stand by them," he cried. "They may go to pieces."

The Englishman was leaning on the rail, and looking coolly at the second victim of the reef.

"Bring her round, Abdullah," he ordered, at last. "We'll see what kind of a mess they're in, anyhow."

The dhow went about, stood to the south, and came back on the other tack to the island. The steamer was lying with her bows much higher than her stern, but she did not seem to pound as she lay. Her steam was blowing off shriekingly in white clouds in the dark, and a dozen lanterns were flittering about her decks.

"Hello—the steamer!" hailed Henninger. "Do you want any help?"

The hurrying lanterns stood still for a moment, and presently Sevier's voice replied, angrily, "No!"

But in a few seconds he cried again, "Stand by till daylight, will you? We don't know how badly she's smashed."

"The worse the better," Henninger commented.

THE SECOND WRECK 347

"We ought to run straight for Cape Town, and let them fry in their own fix."

"Good gracious, you wouldn't do that?" exclaimed Hawke, and Henninger rather grudgingly assented. The dhow stood off and on all night, while the sky cleared and the breeze died away toward the approach of dawn. Daylight revealed the steamer lying with her nose pushed several feet upon the rough barrier, and her stern afloat.

"She seems to lie easy enough," said Henninger, examining her through the glasses. "I fancy she happened to hit a soft spot, and they'll very likely be able to float her off at high tide. It was almost low water when she struck, wasn't it?"

Men were hurrying about her decks, looking over the side, and they already had a boatswain's chair slung almost to the surface of the water, from which a man was examining the position of the bow. As the dhow approached, a white signal was waved from the bridge, and the megaphone roared hoarsely again.

"We want to talk to you. Will you let me come aboard you?"

"That's Sevier," said Elliott.

"Yes, if you come alone," Henninger shouted back, and in a few minutes a boat was got overboard from the steamer, with a red-capped seaman

348 THE TREASURE TRAIL

at the oars, and a man in white clothing in the stern.

This was indeed Sevier, but scarcely recognizable as the smooth and well-dressed Southerner as he climbed with difficulty over the dhow's rail. His white duck garments were torn, blackened, wet, and muddy. His face was grimed with powder, unshaven, and reddened with the sun, and his right arm had the sleeve cut from it and was suspended in crimson-stained bandages. He had lost his characteristic suavity, and he glanced savagely about as he stepped upon the deck.

"This has been a bad business all round," he said, as Henninger came forward to meet him. "I've come to see what terms you'll make."

"We won't make any," replied Henninger.

"Then we'll fight it out."

Henninger laughed rather harshly. "You can go back and begin as soon as you like. You make me tired," he added. "You've lost half your men, you're fast on the reef, you're wounded, and yet you try to bluff us. Don't you know any better than that? Our weapons have twice the range of yours. We could take your whole outfit if we thought it was worth while, and maroon you here — and you want us to make terms to be allowed to go away in peace. Fight it out, if it suits you. We'll leave you here to fight as long as you please."

"We're not so bad as that," said Sevier. "Our ship'll float at the next tide. And there are ten men aboard with rifles, and at this range they'd clear off your decks in about ten seconds."

Henninger glanced quickly at the steamer.

"Let them fire away then," he said, tranquilly.

Sevier turned to his boat, hesitated, and then came back.

"Will you give us a share of the stuff? Say fifty thousand — twenty thousand?"

"Not a hundred. Not one cent."

"Look here!" cried Sevier, with sudden passion.

"Don't you drive a desperate man too far. I won't try to bluff you. Our men can't fight any more, I'll admit; they're a lot of gals. And Carlton's dead —"

"Carlton killed?" exclaimed Henninger, taken by surprise.

"He was shot last night on the bridge, just before she went ashore. He died in an hour. It don't matter; he was never more than a brute. But we can float the steamer in a day or two and make Zanzibar easy, and I'm ruined, clean, stony broke, and there isn't anything that I'll stick at. I'll inform the British resident there, and you'll be arrested at the first port you touch. You'll find the Crown'll claim that gold pretty quick."

"You daren't do it," said Henninger, coolly.

350 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"You've got a record yourself, and you've tried to commit piracy."

"I don't care. For that matter, I can just as easy prove piracy against you. I'll see your crowd done up anyhow, and I'd as soon be jailed as broke."

Henninger appeared to reflect, and took a turn up and down the deck. "I'll tell you," he said, finally. "There are two chests of about seventy or eighty thousand dollars apiece still in the afterhold of the wreck. We've got all the rest, and they were the ones I meant to give you when I made our first offer. We'll leave them for you, after all, and that'll stake you again."

"I'd never get a cent of it," answered Sevier, sullenly. "We've got a rough crew aboard, and they're out of all control."

"Then — we'll give you one gold brick, just one. That'll help you to some sort of boat, and you can come back again for the rest."

"Will you express it to me at Cairo from the first port you touch?" enquired Sevier, eagerly.

"Yes, we'll do that, too. But understand, this isn't a share, nor yet blackmail. It's simply charity — it's alms."

"Confound it, don't bully him, Henninger," muttered Elliott, as the Alabaman flushed darkly.

"Oh, I can stand it," said Sevier, containing

THE SECOND WRECK 351

himself with an obvious effort. "I'll take the alms, and say thank you. I'll look for it at Cairo."

He bowed with an exaggerated flourish, purple with rage and humiliation, and descended into his boat without another word. The boat put back toward the steamer, but before it reached her the dhow was a mile to the southward, on a wide tack toward her home port.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RAINBOW ROAD

"WHAT'S your plan for getting home with all this gold, Henninger?" asked Elliott. "I hardly dared to think of that till we'd got away from the island."

It was almost eleven o'clock at night, and the moonlight broke intermittently from a cloudy sky. The dhow was beating in long tacks down the Mozambique Channel, with a fresh, warm wind blowing from the southeast. Elliott was on guard duty at the after-hatch, sitting on an inverted bucket with a Mauser across his knees; Henninger and Bennett were lingering about the quarter-deck before turning in, and Hawke stood sentinel over the door of the strong-room and talked up the companionway. Day and night two men were always on duty over the treasure; it had been so ever since the gold had come aboard, and the system would not be relaxed while the voyage lasted. This would not be much longer, however, for they were already six days from the latitude of the battle and wreck,

where Sullivan lay in deep water, with three fire-bars sewn up in his canvas coffin.

"We can't sail this craft to England, let alone to America," Bennett remarked.

In spite of success, a certain depression seemed to have settled upon them all. Perhaps it was due to the oppressive heat; perhaps it was the inevitable reaction from excitement and victory. In the faint rays of the deck lantern Elliott could scarcely see his comrades' faces, but by daylight they looked ten years older.

"This is the plan I had thought of," replied Henninger, "though I hardly dared to mention it, as you say, till we had really won out. We'll run into Durban and divide the gold on board. Some of it we will deposit in the banks there; some we'll deposit in Cape Town, a little at a time, so as not to attract attention. We can express some of it to New York, and one or two of us can sail for England on the mail-steamer and take some of it along. The important thing is to scatter it, and I think we can get off quite unnoticed, if we are careful."

"Just how much did we make of it?" asked Hawke, from the bottom of the companion-ladder.

"One million, seven hundred thousand, and odd," replied Henninger, in an uninterested tone. "Nearly three hundred and fifty thousand apiece. Of course, if we can find anything of any of

354 THE TREASURE TRAIL

Sullivan's relatives we'll fix them up with his share."

"What are you going to do with your share of it?" Bennett inquired, curiously.

Henninger gave a short laugh. "How do I know? Blow it in, I suppose, in some fool way, and go out looking for more. What I imagine I'm going to do is to live on it for the rest of my life, but I know myself better than that. It means an income of say fourteen thousand a year, doesn't it? I've seen that much put on the turn of a card."

"Don't go and be a fool," said Elliott. "I've lived for most of my years on about one-tenth of fourteen thousand."

"And I've lived for months on nothing at all. No, it's no use handing out nice, sensible motherly advice, for there's only one kind of life for me. I've got the fever in me, and I'll be looking for the road to the end of the rainbow as long as I live, I fancy. Do you remember our conversation on the Atlantic liner, Elliott? I never said so much for myself before or since, and I won't do it now, thanks. Talk to Hawke and Bennett; they haven't been on the rainbow road so long."

"You said that night that you wanted to win this game so as to get out of grafting," Elliott retorted.

"Well, so I do—only I know I won't," said Henninger.

"Do you know what I'm going to do?" remarked Hawke. "You'll laugh, but I'm going to buy a half-interest in a big bee ranch in California. It's an ideal life. The bees do all the work, and all you have to do is to lie in the shade and collect profits once in awhile. You can run a fruit farm on the side, and there's big money in it."

"That's what I should like above all things," said Margaret, who came aft at that moment.

"What will you do, Elliott?" queried Henninger, half-ironically.

"I don't know," said Elliott, vaguely, glancing up at the girl, who leaned against the rail, balancing herself easily as the dhow rolled. "The first thing is to make sure of getting away with the stuff. Henninger thinks we had better put in at Durban, Miss Laurie, and divide the gold and scatter it as much as possible."

"What for? Will any one rob us?" asked Margaret, quickly.

"Yes — the government police," said Bennett.

"But I thought — Haven't we a right to the gold? Isn't it ours?"

"Heaven knows it ought to be, after all we've gone through," remarked Elliott.

"But isn't it?" Margaret insisted.

"You're not sophisticated enough, Miss Laurie," said Henninger. "There's always a claimant for as

356 THE TREASURE TRAIL

much money as this. The gold seems to have been stolen from the Transvaal government, and it's certain that the English government will claim it — if they hear that it's been recovered. But we don't intend that they shall hear."

"Then this gold belongs to the English government?"

"I thought you understood the situation. Legally, perhaps, it does, but —"

"Then I shall not take an atom of it," said Margaret.

"But you must!" exclaimed Elliott. "We're injuring no one —"

"I'm not a thief," Margaret interrupted again, and walked forward.

The adventurers looked at one another, disconcerted, and Hawke climbed up the ladder to look with an alarmed countenance over the deck.

"She's got to take it," said Bennett.

"Yes, of course she must take her share," agreed Henninger. "Gad, she's the pluckiest woman I ever saw. She's been a regular brick all through this thing."

"She'll take it or not, as she pleases," said Elliott, in an unusually aggressive tone, and failing to grasp the humour of the situation.

"Maybe you won't take any of it yourself," Hawke satirized.

"There'll be all the more for the rest of you if I don't," returned Elliott.

"The fact is, we're all getting nervous and morbid," Henninger remarked. "A good sleep is the best antidote, and I'm going to turn in."

Bennett also swathed himself in his blanket and sought a soft plank by the lee rail, with the prospect of being rolled across the deck when the dhow should go upon the other tack. Hawke retired out of sight below, and Elliott was left to silence.

Under the stilly drawn sails he could see Margaret still leaning over the bow. Behind him an Arab bore heavily upon the tiller-head, holding her steady, and it occurred to Elliott that the man could stab him in the back with the greatest ease. It would not be an unfitting conclusion for the adventure that was stained with so much blood already; and he imagined the sudden rising of the Moslem crew, the brief *melée*, the flash of pistols and knives, the massacre on the reeling deck. But he continued to sit on the keg, with his back to the helmsman, and did not trouble to turn around.

A yard beneath his feet were nearly two million dollars in hard gold; the treasure that had spun so much intrigue and mystery over three continents was in his power at last. But the price had been paid; there had been blood enough spilled to redden every sovereign or louis or double-eagle that might

358 THE TREASURE TRAIL

ever be minted from the metal. Elliott fancied he heard the crash of the *Clara McClay* on the reefs when all but two of her company had perished. He remembered the revolver drawn on the platform of the St. Louis train, and the bleeding figure of Bennett beside the rails. He saw vividly the gambling-rooms; he saw the missionary reeling back from the red knife; he saw Sullivan with the widening scarlet stain on his breast, and he heard again the fierce hail from Sevier's steamer, and heard the crash as she rammed the rocks where the *Clara McClay* had perished months before. And, as he brooded there in the dark, there arose in him a loathing and a horror of the gold that had worked like a potent poison in the heart of every man who had known of it.

In the whole adventure there was but one period that had left no bitter taste. He remembered the interlude from the treasure hunt at Hongkong, and the bungalow on the Peak, where for a month there was neither the bewilderment of tangled mysteries nor the feverish excitement of greed. The heat, the rain, the miseries that had tortured him, he had already forgotten, or he remembered them only dimly as the discomforts that emphasized more keenly the graceful and domestic charm of such a home as he had never known before.

The Arab steersman droned softly to himself as

he leaned on the creaking tiller behind. Margaret had not yet gone to her hammock. He could see her still at the bow, looking forward over the sweeping seas in the cloudy moonlight. She thought him a thief; she had as good as said so; and he watched her, feeling strangely as if everything depended upon her staying there till he was released from duty.

Bennett came up at midnight to relieve him, and Elliott went forward at once. But he could think of nothing in the manner of what he wanted to say, and after a few commonplaces he fell silent, and they leaned over the prow together, listening to the sucking gurgle and the hissing crash as the cut-water split the seas.

"I want you to see clearly just why I insisted on coming with you," said Margaret, breaking the silence at last. "I didn't understand it at all, then. My father had spoken of recovering this gold — he couldn't have known that it was government money — and I supposed that it was right to do it. In fact, I felt almost as if he had left it to me. Then I had no money — nothing. I knew that I was dependent on you for everything. It was even your money that brought me from China; I know it was, though the consul said he advanced it to me. It nearly maddened me with shame, and — I didn't know what to do. Only I knew that I couldn't take

360 THE TREASURE TRAIL

anything more from you. I thought I had a right to a share of this gold, but I couldn't even let you go and do the work for me. I had to help, and do my part — and so I did it.

"But now it's all over. I understand it all as I didn't before, and you see that I can't take a cent of this money. I should feel myself a criminal as long as I lived. But I don't blame you for taking it, if you feel that you can."

"I'm not going to take any of it, either," Elliott interrupted.

She was silent for nearly a minute, and then said, in a curious, almost harsh, voice, "Why not?"

"Because there are other things I value more — your good opinion, for instance," said Elliott, with difficulty, feeling all the painful joys of renunciation. He wanted to say more; he struggled vainly for words, but after an ineffectual effort he fell back upon a practical question.

"What will you do, then?"

"I've been thinking of that," she said. "I shall try to get something to do at the Cape. I can always make a living. I can do almost anything."

"Oh, heavens! You mustn't do that. You sha'n't!" groaned Elliott.

"Why not?" she said, with a smile. "Do you know, it is almost a relief to have the weight of that terrible treasure taken away. It has been a sort of

curse to every one, I think. But it seems a pity, doesn't it, that we should get nothing at all for having worked so hard and travelled so far and risked so much. The government ought to refund our expenses, anyway."

"Salvage! I should think so!" cried Elliott, smiting his hand on the rail. "Why didn't I think of it before? Of course we have a claim for our trouble and expense, and we can collect it, too, if we turn in our share of the stuff to the Crown."

"But I suppose they would allow us only a trifle, after all," said Margaret.

"Not a bit of it. Twenty to fifty per cent. of the value is always paid for salvaging a cargo. Your share now is nearly three hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and at least a hundred thousand of that will be honestly, lawfully yours. Any court will award it to you."

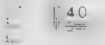
"But will Mr. Henninger —"

"Henninger and the others will never give up a cent of their share; I know that. We mustn't spoil their plans, I suppose, so we will give them time to get safely clear. Then we will surrender our part of it, and present our bill for expenses, and say nothing about any more having been recovered. The Crown will be glad enough to get any of it back."



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362 THE TREASURE TRAIL

"This is the best news of all!" said Margaret, with a long breath. "A hundred thousand dollars! That will be fabulous wealth to me! I can have all the things, and see all the things, and do all the things that I dreamed of all my life and never expected to realize. Now I believe I'm really glad to be rich again. Aren't you?"

"I don't know," Elliott muttered.

"I think we ought to try to use this money so as to justify having it," Margaret went on. "It has cost so much misery and so many lives, and I want to spend it so as to make it clean again. I want to make others happy with it, as well as be happy myself. What are you going to do with it?"

"I don't know," Elliott burst out. "I don't value this money, whether it's a hundred thousand or a million, not a straw. I'd throw it away; I'd blow it in, like Henninger — God knows what I'll do with it. There's only one thing that I really want. I told you what it was at that hotel in New York, and you ordered me never to speak of it again. If I can't have that I don't care much what becomes of the money, or of anything else."

"Don't say that. Don't speak of that — not now!" murmured Margaret; and as he hesitated she turned quickly away and slipped toward the stern companionway. "You won't lose by waiting," was what she left in a semi-audible whisper

as she vanished, and Elliott had this to ponder on as he stood watching the heavy swell rolling blackly toward Africa, toward Durban, where the dhow was due in another day.

But it was really two days before she glided up the port and anchored innocently in the bay, looking anything but the treasure-ship she was. And now the most harassing, the most anxious and delicate part of the whole adventure was begun.

Margaret went on to Cape Town at once, with instructions to secure a maid in that city as a travelling companion and to sail direct for London. And in her absence the gold was taken ashore piecemeal, in pockets and travelling-bags and hat-boxes, and little by little exchanged for clean Bank of England notes and shiny sovereigns. Over \$150,000 was sold in Durban, and then the party proceeded to Cape Town, where, following the same procedure, nearly twice as much was passed over to the banks for specie.

The rest, Henninger decided, could best be disposed of in America, and he was, besides, anxious to get out of British territory as soon as possible. Accordingly the dhow was dismantled, the crew paid off, the reis given a present of two hundred sovereigns above his salary, and Henninger, Hawke, and Bennett sailed for New York direct, with a mountain of trunks, each containing a few gold

364 THE TREASURE TRAIL

blocks packed among unnecessary clothing. And two days afterward Elliott took passage for England with six hundred and forty thousand dollars, being his own and Margaret's share of the cargo of the *Clara McClay*.

Margaret was prepared for his coming, and between them the treasure was safely deposited in the bank, at which Elliott felt an incubus lifted from his mind. The next step was to secure an experienced marine lawyer to forward their salvage claims.

This gentleman, after passing through a stage of stupefaction at their unexampled scrupulosity, advised that a claim of forty per cent. of the value be made, in consideration of the circumstances of the case. They made it, and then there was long to wait. Red tape, Treasury tape, Admiralty tape, civil tape was unrolled to a disheartening length, and the new Transvaal Crown Colony even put in its claim, as the original owner of the bullion. In the midst of the delay Elliott received a message from Henninger:

"We have disposed of all our goods," he wrote. "Go ahead and make the best terms you can. Hawke has gone to California to start his bee farm, but he thinks he will look into a few mining deals in Nevada before he gets there. Bennett is playing the races on a system. I am saving my

money at present, but I see a chance to double my money in Venezuela. The treasure trail is a long trail, and we're not at the end of the rainbow yet."

And in England Elliott and Margaret were finding the latter stages of the treasure trail long indeed. The salvage case took a great deal of deciding; the courts appeared to be convinced that some occult dishonesty must be concealed beneath the offer to restore any part of the lost treasure, and haggled over the percentage in a manner, it appeared to Elliott, highly unworthy of the traditions of a mighty nation. Ultimately, however, a compromise was arrived at. The government would pay thirty-three per cent.; and Elliott surrendered the bullion and received back two hundred and twelve thousand dollars, which he divided equally with Margaret. Six days later they were at sea, bound out of Southampton for New York.

Surely, Elliott thought, this was the last of the long trail, as he listened to the regular "swish — crash!" on her bows that had become so odiously familiar; and he determined that all should be settled before he sighted American land.

"If I ever get ashore again," he remarked to Margaret, "I'm going to the quietest, sleepest country town I can find, and never set eyes on a steamer or a railway train again as long as I live."

They were looking over the stern, where night

366 THE TREASURE TRAIL

had fallen on the heaving swell. It had rained hard, but was clearing; an obscured moon faintly lit the sea.

"And do some sort of good work," said Margaret. "You've got ability, money, and every chance of a happy life."

"It's in your hands," Elliott declared, feeling his opportunity.

"It's not!" she cried, vehemently. "It's in your own. You're too strong to depend on any one else for your life's success. I don't like to hear that!"

"Listen," said Elliott. "You wouldn't let me say this when you were poor; perhaps you'll hear it now when you are rich. I was going to give up every cent of my share of the gold to try to please you—to do what you thought was square. I'd have given up the whole ship-load—no, that's absurdly small, for there simply isn't anything in the world, past, present, or future, that I wouldn't give up and call it a good bargain if it would make you care for me a little. The best time I ever had was when I was luckily able to help you, and now I could almost find it in my heart to be sorry that you have all you need, and don't need me any more."

She touched his arm ever so gently, and he turned and looked squarely at her.

"Not need you!—you!" was all she said.

The sudden throb of his heart made him gasp. The deck was full of people, but he put his hand hard down upon hers as it lay on the rail, and he felt her fingers curl up into his palm.

"Be careful," said she, with a new, subtle thrill in her voice. "Oh, look!"

From the clearing sky astern the moon was now pouring a full, glorious flood upon the heaving Atlantic, where the heavy swell ran in ivory-crested combers. In the pure white light the foam glittered with prismatic colours, wave after wave, like a long broken rainbow fallen upon the sea, and sparkling with the streaks of phosphorescence of the steamer's wake.

"The rainbow road," as Henninger calls it; "the treasure trail," said Elliott. "The trail's ended."

But Margaret shook her head. "No," she said. "The rainbow road has just begun."

THE END.